



# **THE BUTTERFLY NET**

*Books by John Lodwick*

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SOMEWHERE A VOICE IS CALLING  
THE BUTTERFLY NET

# THE BUTTERFLY NET

A Novel

*by*

JOHN LODWICK



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# One

ON the 20th of November, 1912, Adrian Dormant, a novelist, of British birth, distantly married, who bears no more than a casual physical resemblance to the writer of this book, landed at Dover, bound for London upon business connected with a small inheritance received from his father, lately dead. With the exception of three brief visits to his native country, Dormant had spent the seven years previous to the following events on the mainland of Greece, and in various Greek islands, in the mistaken belief that in those places—and more particularly in the latter—he might, by leading a simple life, further more rapidly his knowledge of his craft, and of men. He had, instead, become very bored, done almost no work for two years, and his hair was growing grey at the age of thirty-four.

"Have you anything to declare?" said the Customs officer.

"No," said Dormant.

The man looked at Dormant fixedly for a moment; then, with his stub of blue chalk, he inscribed a hieroglyphic on the side of the suitcase, close to the faded label which advertised the Hotel Danieli, in Venice.

"Back from Italy?" he asked pleasantly: the month was November, and business not brisk.

"Well, not exactly," replied Dormant, for the label commemorated a visit which he had made to that country, with his mother, nearly twenty years previously.

"Who's next, please?" said the Customs officer. Abandoning Dormant, he turned his attention to a small man who was standing behind two large pigskin suitcases a few yards away.

Dormant had often wondered what it was that enabled

these officials, while permitting the innocent to pass with a smile and a flourish of the hand, to pounce without fuss, without error, upon the guilty? He had observed the man with the pigskin suitcases both in the bar of the ship, and more recently when descending the gangway, and on each of these occasions his fellow-traveller had seemed unduly, almost pathologically nervous. Yet, as Dormant well knew, even the most upright of men whose consciences are clear, behave in a shifty manner in these particular circumstances, starting visibly when addressed, blushing and looking about them for means of escape if their interrogation is in any way prolonged.

No, thought Dormant, the solution lay elsewhere for if, in the holiday season, for example, the baggage of every traveller who acted suspiciously were to be searched, the boat train could hardly leave for London before midnight. Dormant was inclined to believe that action was most often taken on the basis of information received, and, indeed, from his personal experience he remembered the case of a jealous husband who, desiring to incommode his absconding wife, had rung up the airport and denounced her as a carrier of contraband. This unfortunate lady, upon her arrival at Le Bourget, had been subjected to sundry indignities, some of them too terrible to describe, by hard-faced women, in a freezing shack. Nothing had been found upon her person or within her impedimenta.

Not did Dormant believe that anything would be found on the present occasion. Yet, because it was obvious from the official's resolute air as he advanced towards the pigskin suitcases that their owner would not be allowed to pass unchallenged, he decided to linger near-by and to watch the proceedings, never having witnessed the Excise in the full operative rigour of their essential function. His sympathies, however, lay entirely with his fellow-traveller, who he now

observed to be not only small, but also foreign, and probably Jewish, and it occurred to him that it may have been these facts, rather than any positive knowledge or intuition which were about to bring calamity upon him.

"Have you read the list of dutiable articles?" enquired the Customs officer, and Dormant noted the sinister change in the formula employed.

"I have," replied the traveller.

"Open your baggage, please."

The man did as he was bid, revealing, in the first suitcase, mauve pyjamas, neat piles of socks, silk skirts; and in the second, heavier apparel: suits, shoes, a folded overcoat. The suspect's manner was now more resolute. He met the gaze of the Customs officer calmly, and with no attempt to disguise his deep dislike and contempt for him. Yet there was sweat upon his forehead; sweat which he had evidently intended to wipe away with a handkerchief produced some seconds previously, but the handkerchief now hung limp, a white flag of surrender, as he watched the enemy insert practised fingers beneath the pile of clothes, removing for examination, now a book—which Dormant identified with some surprise as *Le Rouge et Le Noir*—now a wooden bowl containing shaving cream, and at last a black patent-leather pump.

Nothing incriminating was discovered, except a transparent packet containing articles of a prophylactic nature with which not even the most brazen of men would wish to see himself identified in public. The Customs officer made some play with this, brandishing it for all to see, but although his quarry continued to sweat, he appeared unmoved by the proof of his venery.

Dormant began to take an intense interest in these proceedings, for they seemed to him to be unduly stylised, as if the two men involved were acting parts, feeding each

other fresh repliques so that their pageant might continue. It was inconceivable, for example, that a crook of the international class should cache valuables within the folds of his night attire or in the toes of his bedroom slippers. Dormant had read somewhere about a diamond smuggler who had hidden his merchandise beneath the shells of a consignment of live tortoises, and who had been unmasked only when about to import his four-thousandth tortoise from Belgium into France. Dormant was disappointed in the present scene, and uneasily aware that his motives in lingering to watch it were unhealthy and impure: much as are those of persons who, hearing that a man has been injured by a lorry, proceed at the double to the scene; not to render aid, but in order to learn whether the victim is dead.

Yet, had Dormant paused to reflect, he would have realised that the moves, and the fragments of dialogue which he had so far witnessed, were but preliminaries of a deadly game in which neither of the adversaries proposed either to ask for, or to accord quarter: and this fact was abruptly proved to him when the Customs officer, straightening himself, wiping his hands with a duster as if to remove from them some uncleanness, pronounced, with a gentle smile, and in a voice no different from that which he would have employed when inviting a colleague to share his pot of tea, the most terrible phrase in the British legal vocabulary:

*"Have you any objection to being searched?"*

A short pause ensued: a pause which Dormant employed profitably in debate between the more honest and more hypocritical parts of his conscience, as to what he himself would have replied to a similar question. *"Certainly . . . I have a dozen objections, and propose to explain some of them to you."* As prompt and as sharp as the answering shot of one sniper annoyed by another, his answer would come, and in

the subsequent confusion, while the perplexed official looked about him for aid, Dormant would place in his mouth, gnash with his teeth, and swallow the pesetas, the Djibuti francs, or the dollars which he had introduced fraudulently into British territory.

But even as he formulated this pleasant vision of his intrepidity and presence of mind, a nasty, nagging little voice, a Thirsites inside his cranium, informed Dormant that he would have done nothing of the sort, but instead have mumbled unintelligibly, sweated, even as this man was now sweating, and, worse, have felt that the retribution about to be visited upon him was a just fate, a suitable apotheosis. For Dormant had been exiled far too long, and had begun to take the tribal customs of his country seriously.

But what did the transgressor say? Dormant, engrossed with his own thoughts, caught the answer only when the seventh word was spoken, and worked backwards until, possessed of the full sense, it took his breath away.

*"I hope you have a radiator in your little room."*

"Come this way, please." The official raised a wooden flap giving access to his inner citadel. He did not offer to carry his victim's bags, nor permit a near-by porter to do so. The two men disappeared from view behind a stack of cabin trunks, could be seen again briefly, then they entered a brightly-lit office. Immediately, two blinds were drawn. The office ceased to be brightly lit, became dark and sinister.

"Another poor bastard on 'is way to Brixton," remarked the porter.

Dormant made no reply. He looked at the office from which the sound of voices could be heard. Then, aware that he was himself the subject of close scrutiny, and not wishing to be taken for the man's confederate, picked up his bag and moved towards the train.

He had no difficulty in finding a carriage to himself and, having installed his baggage, sat down to a contemplation of the goods yards and of the dull, grey sea. He was disturbed in his reverie by the entry of a waiter.

"Tea, sir?"

"I suppose so," said Dormant with resignation.

A whistle sounded. The train began to move. Suddenly, there was the sound of shouting; then of a commotion in the corridor. A man, in whom Dormant recognised his late neighbour at the Customs counter, came into view, paused for a moment to throw a coin out of the window at a porter, then entered Dormant's carriage.

"That was a near thing," he said.

Dormant did not reply.

"I daresay you thought you wouldn't see me again?" said the man, and to make sure that his remark should receive a reply he leant forward and touched Dormant gently in the ribs with his index finger.

Dormant sighed. Ever since leaving Marseille, thirty-six hours previously, it had been his misfortune to travel in the company of the loquacious: first with two French Colonials who had discoursed to him interminably concerning the intricacies of Annamite politics and then, from the *Gare du Nord* to Calais with members of a French football team who assumed that, as an Englishman, he must surely be aware of the defensive tactics employed by their coming opponents, Chelsea.

In the present case, however, his peevishness was attenuated by curiosity. Had the man broken free and run towards the moving train? This seemed improbable, for it was to be assumed that the inspectors, unencumbered by baggage, could run much faster. He had therefore been released and, to judge by the expression of triumph on his face, in circumstances which caused him a deep satisfaction.

"I'm bound to say I didn't think we'd meet again," said Dormant cautiously.

The man laughed heartily: "I cut it a bit fine," he said, "but what's the odds: you got to have some fun in life, and I always get 'em with that act. They just kannt resist it."

His accent, Dormant noticed, although superficially American, had quite certainly a Central European origin.

"D'you mean to say you were putting it on?" said Dormant.

"Sure! Want to see." The man sat down opposite Dormant. For a moment his face was composed, expressionless: then his jaw sagged, his eyes behind the rimless spectacles rolled. Sweat stood out in great globules upon his forehead.

"It was this latter phenomenon which interested Dormant most. He enquired how it was achieved.

"You just contract your stomach muscles," replied his companion. "Easy. Anyone can do it . . . wait for it!" For Dormant's benefit he made a special effort: watching him, anyone would have thought that it was a hot day far East of Suez.

"But why?" said Dormant, "why do you go to so much trouble?"

The man grinned. "Have a cigar?" he said, producing a case, and when Dormant refused, prepared and lit one for himself. "They see me go through five or six times a month," he said. "They are not stupid. They know darn well I don't go to Paris for the *Folies Bergère*. I ain't got that kind of face, now, have I?"

Privately, Dormant considered that he had exactly that kind of face, but it seemed more prudent not to say so.

The man continued: "Right. They know I must be in the business, but they never find nothing, and that makes them mad. So what do I do? Why, I give them hope . . . see?"



\* Every time they pick on me, they think it's going to be their big day . . . and that calms them down and we part good friends. I done my duty, and they done theirs. Everybody's happy . . . *compris?*"

At this moment, the attendant entered the carriage, bearing a tray. On the tray were a teapot, several slices of bread and butter, and a cut of dry and crumbling cake.

"Good heavens, I don't want all that," said Dormant.

"You asked for tea, sir."

Meekly, Dormant allowed the tray to be placed upon his knees. His companion, meanwhile, had engaged the attendant in conversation.

"Good afternoon, Bertram."

"Why, hullo, Mr. Mendoza, glad to see you again. Will you be taking anything?"

"The usual, please, Bertram." Drawing the smaller of his two suitcases towards him, the man opened it. "I got it for you, Bertram. I never break a promise."

"Oh, Mr. Mendoza, that's real kind of you. My kid will be pleased."

From his suitcase, Mr. Mendoza produced a small model, about five inches in height, of the Eiffel tower. "Something to remember me by," he said, and as the steward pocketed the toy, he raised his hand and pointed to a dark line upon the horizon: "Look," he said, "the coast of France. Ah! it's good to be home again, Bertram, I can tell you that."

"I bet it is, sir," said the steward, and he gazed at Dormant, no doubt wondering why the latter had not yet begun to eat his tea.

When the steward had gone, Mr. Mendoza leant forward. He tapped Dormant's knee: "I know everybody on this line," he said.

"So I perceive."

Mr. Mendoza looked at his watch. "If you don't want that cake," he said, "I'll eat it."

Dormant passed him the plate.

"I'll eat the bread and butter, too, if you've no objection?"

"None at all," said Dormant, and he passed the second plate.

"The fact is," said Mr. Mendoza, munching, and yet, still, for some reason looking intently at his watch. "Fact is, I'm a bit short of cash at the moment. I suppose you couldn't advance me a couple of pounds?"

In all his life Dormant had never received a request for a loan delivered so abruptly, and with such apparent confidence in the outcome of the negotiation. He looked at his companion with surprise: "Well, you're a rare one, I must say," he said. "What on earth makes you think I'm going to lend you money?"

"Five and half seconds," said Mr. Mendoza. He ceased to look at his watch, and shot back his cuff. "Not bad, you'll do."

"I'm not going to lend you any money if that's what you mean."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Mendoza blandly. "My dear Mr. Dormant," a glance at one of the labels hanging from the luggage-rack supplied him with the name. "I do not want your money, but I like to know with whom I am travelling. Often they put people in my carriage hoping that I'll start to talk."

"That would be a bit difficult, considering that you ~~those~~ this carriage yourself, wouldn't it?"

"Not at all." The strange little man continued to examine Dormant as if the latter were a prospective client. "Not at all. They know that I am of a sociable disposition, you see. This train is half empty. What more natural than that I should enter the carriage of one who shows every likelihood

of being a delightful travelling companion?" and he smiled, exposing a magnificent set of false teeth, as bright as new tombstones.

Dormant had sufficient experience of life to realise that people who engaged him in conversation in long-distance trains were seldom mad, although they might often appear to be so. He therefore examined, in his turn, Mr. Mendoza's clothing in search of the pack of cards, but no tell-tale protuberance was visible. He decided that Mr. Mendoza was probably travelling in something: an encyclopædia perhaps, or water softeners. A small package above the man's head might well contain just such an article, which would presently be unpacked, and demonstrated, to the accompaniment of a lecture on the dangers of London water.

But, whatever his line, Mr. Mendoza was clearly in no hurry to push it. More than an hour must pass before the arrival of the train at Victoria would oblige him to release his victim. Mr. Mendoza finished the bread and butter. At last, having wiped his mouth daintily, with a handkerchief, he spoke again.

"Yes, five and a half seconds," he said. "That is a point in your favour, and your answer was a good one, too. I don't often receive that answer."

"D'you mean to say you always ask people for money in trains?"

"Invariably," replied Mr. Mendoza. "Invariably. I like to know with whom I am travelling, and there's no more certain method at judging a man's character than his reaction to that question when put to him by a stranger."

Dormant now abandoned his theory concerning the water softener. Mr. Mendoza, he felt sure, was in books. There would be manuals of practical psychology in his suitcases and presently he would explain how, for a mere signature on a piece of paper, and twelve monthly payments, Dormant

might strengthen his character, win new friends, inspire respect even in his enemies.

"And what was your estimate of my personality?" he enquired tolerantly.

"You are timid, sir, yet not without a sense of humour and a feeling for the ridiculous. You have yourself borrowed money, and not paid it back. You are unmarried, and have no current attachment."

"How do you know that?"

"Mr. Dormant, even the most experienced and crafty of married men look over their shoulder when asked for money. The reaction is instinctive. Their wives are with them in the spirit."

"Please go on," said Dormant, impressed.

Mr. Mendoza smiled: "Ah! Now I see that your interest is aroused," he said benignly.

"If you want to know," said Dormant, "I'm wondering why you started to talk with an American accent, and have now dropped it."

"A small miscalculation," said Mr. Mendoza. "To be frank, sir, I wasn't quite certain at first that you were a gentleman."

"I see," said Dormant. Mr. Mendoza was beginning to irritate him.

"To return to the subject of our conversation," said Mr. Mendoza, "let me say that, when asked for money, the mean wriggle, pretend not to have heard me: the weak endeavour to change the subject of conversation: the vain, imagining that they can dominate even the most unusual circumstances, allow me to go on talking, and are rewarded with one of the various versions of my life story."

"In that case I must be vain," said Dormant.

"Why, yes! Have people never told you so?" Mr. Mendoza leant forward and touched Dormant's knee.

"But perhaps you have had enough of generalities? Perhaps you would now like me to discuss your character in detail?"

"I would, indeed," said Dormant, more than ever convinced that the attempt to sell him something could not be long delayed.

Mr. Mendoza crossed his legs. He inserted his thumbs inside the lining of his waistcoat, contriving to look rather like a bookmaker who has had a good day.

"You are an observer of human nature in some professional capacity," he surmised.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because my initial approach amused you, and because you are letting me talk about myself. No one ever lets another man talk about himself unless he has a good reason for it."

"Well, what am I, then?"

"You are a representative of a firm of life insurance, Mr. Dormant. At the present moment you are calculating my arterial tension."

"Quite wrong," said Dormant, piqued.

"Very well, then: you are a travel agent. You are returning to England, having escorted a party of your countrymen round the sights of," Mr. Mendoza glanced upwards at the luggage-rack, "glamorous Italy," he added.

"Certainly not. God forbid," said Dormant, outraged. His profession was one of which, normally, he preferred to keep people in ignorance, experience having taught him that it was regarded with suspicion—and nowhere more so than in his native land—but any revelation was preferable to being taken for a barker from Cook's.

"Mr. Dormant," said Mendoza, "I do not often make mistakes. Will you please hold out your right hand with the fingers splayed. Also, turn towards the window, so that I may see your mouth in profile."

Dormant did both these things.

"It is time you stopped biting your nails, Mr. Dormant. Before we part, remind me to give you the name of a product which I recommend to all nervous men. The taste is so unpleasant that I guarantee success. You have your mother's mouth, Mr. Dormant, and it doesn't suit your father's chin."

"Please come to the point," said Dormant, exasperated.

"Very well. You are a writer, Mr. Dormant, and not a very rich one."

"How do you know that?"

"The upper flesh on the left side of your median finger is calloused by the constant rubbing of inferior fountain-pens. There is also an ink-mark on your collar. You have had trouble with a difficult paragraph since you last changed your shirt."

"Might I not just as easily be a clerk?" enquired Dormant tartly.

"No, sir, for clerks use mostly typewriters and adding machines these days. They are of a mechanical and practical turn of mind, which you clearly are not. I have only to observe the way your shoe-laces are tied to know that."

"All right," said Dormant, "supposing what you say is true, what kind of books do I write?"

"My dear Mr. Dormant, d'you take me for a child? You write fiction, of course. Biography, history: these are branches of your art which require a clear and well-ordered mind. Of course, I don't say that you may not have tried your hand at autobiography. I would not be at all surprised to learn that the experiences you describe are very largely your own."

"You are remarkably acute," said Dormant, not without discomfiture. A tendency toward autobiography, and a lack of inventive power in his work were precisely the

weaknesses with which critics reproached him, being prevented from pursuing their dissection of his rebarbative heroes and his too feckless heroines to a logical conclusion only by the saving provisions of the law of libel.

"Yes," he said, "I have written several bad books, and only one good one."

"Come, come, Mr. Dormant," said Mr. Mendoza, "you are too easily depressed and cast down. Take my word for it, however bad your novels, there are others who write worse, and who have not even your charming false modesty. Show me your hand again and I will tell you your future."

Dormant displayed his hand.

"Hum!" declared Mr. Mendoza, "Venus is well developed, but then so is Saturn. You lack energy, Mr. Dormant, and above all, circumspection. Your character, I would say, is lunar: imagination is predominant, and with it goes a desire, probably unsatisfied, for chastity. You will achieve success in middle life, but your success will not be lasting."

"Why not?"

"Because of the general weakness of your character, Mr. Dormant. Desire, ambition: these things exist for you only when vague and unfulfilled. If you do not believe me, compare your hand with mine." Mr. Mendoza placed his hand, which was narrow, wrinkled and extremely hairy beside Dormant's, which was squat and broad of palm. "Observe the line which represents my head," he continued, and Dormant saw that this line was, indeed, deeply scored. "Now observe the line which represents my luck," said Mr. Mendoza. "This too is deep and sure, and yet, as you can see, several times it stops, and then begins again, like a message in Morse Code. What is that message, Mr. Dormant?" Mr. Mendoza raised the same fabulous hand to prove that his question was purely rhetorical. "I will tell you. The message says '*Go on*', and that is what I have done,

sir. There have been ups and downs, many of them, but I always win in the end."

"I'm sure you do," said Dormant politely. He wondered whether Mr. Mendoza really thought in these terms about himself; when he was alone, for example. Dormant would have liked to have pursued this question further, but his speculations were interrupted by the arrival of the waiter, bearing a bucket in which lay a bottle of champagne.

"Thank you, Charlie," said Mr. Mendoza.

"Bertram, sir."

"That's right. Raise the flap, and put it on the table, will you?" Dormant noticed that, when talking to the waiter, Mr. Mendoza employed an accent which approximated closely to Cockney. Having already seen his companion in the rôle of a cringing and dubious foreigner at the Customs, in that of an American man of the world upon his first entrance to the carriage, and, finally, as an English gentleman of wide culture, more recently; Dormant began to wish that some rustic or regional character might enter the carriage . . . a Scots ticket collector for example . . . so that he might further observe Mr. Mendoza's truly remarkable powers of mimicry.

"Anything else, sir?" enquired the waiter respectfully.

"Not today, lad," said Mr. Mendoza. He paid, and over and above the sum demanded, provided a most handsome tip. "Something for the kid," he said, not being apparently the man to allow his generosity to pass unnoticed. Children, reflected Dormant, seemed to play a large and useful part in Mr. Mendoza's life.

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it, Bertram." Mr. Mendoza lay back on the cushions. His sigh, although exaggerated, was artistically delivered. "Ah me. Ah my!" he said. "Here today and gone tomorrow. No rest for the weary. Got to go to



Ireland on Thursday." With much feeling and a considerable *vibrato*, Mr. Mendoza began to hum "The Mountains of Mourne".

"You certainly get around, sir," said the waiter respectfully.

"One has to keep the wheels of business turning," said Mr. Mendoza, complacently, and he winked at Dormant.

The respite occasioned by the arrival of the waiter struck Dormant as offering an opportunity to break off relations with Mr. Mendoza. With this end in view he took up the copy of the *Spectator* which he had bought at the station bookstall, and began to read, with an intensity of expression designed to discourage further interruption.

About ten minutes later when the train was passing through the hop-field near Tonbridge, Dormant raised his head and saw, to his surprise, that Mr. Mendoza was himself deep in a book.

Five further minutes passed. Dormant again raised his head. His companion was still reading but suddenly he looked up and smiled.

"Two can play at that game," said Mr. Mendoza. "Why don't you say straight out you want to talk to me?"

"I want nothing of the kind."

"Yes; you do. Don't be silly. Like to see what I'm reading?"

Mr. Mendoza held out his book: it was Sydney Smith's *Forensic Medicine*.

"One of my little sidelines," he said.

"One of your props, you mean, don't you," said Dormant nastily. He laid aside his paper. "Mr. Mendoza," he said, "what *is* your profession?"

Mr. Mendoza grinned. "There you are, boy," he said. "I knew you'd come to it." He looked about him furtively; then, rising, pulled down the blinds. "Even

the cushions have ears here," he said. "Do you talk French?"

"Yes, I know that language."

*"Très bien. Alors je vais vous raconter tout ça en français, hein. Mais faites attention. On ne peut jamais trop se mêler dans le pays."* In English Mr. Mendoza was anglophile: in French, which he spoke fluently but inaccurately with a Ménilmontant accent, he was evidently francophile and anglophobe. He continued to speak in French for the remainder of the journey.

"The reason I'm telling you," he said, "is because you're a writer. Then if you put it in a book no one will believe you, and if you go around telling people they'll think you just made it up."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Dormant.

"No? Well, never mind. Doctors, priests, writers; all the same thing, isn't it; question of professional secrecy?"

"There have been several regrettable lapses from that rule," said Dormant.

"But not you, eh? Matter of fact, Mr. Dormant, I've been thinking. It mightn't be at all a bad thing if you used my story . . . for both of us, I mean. And don't think it's the only one either. I could tell you hundreds of yarns, and every one of them true. Gee, Mr. Dormant, if I could write . . ." Mr. Mendoza brought his fist down with vigour on Dormant's knee. A reflex action caused Dormant's foot to start forward, striking Mr. Mendoza in the thigh. There were mutual apologies.

"You mustn't let inexperience stand in your way," said Dormant, "very few people do."

Mr. Mendoza stood up. He slid the door open an inch or two, closed it, then, pointing in a direction which Dormant assumed to be that of France, whispered: "It's *books* that I take over there, mister . . . *books*."

"Books?" repeated Dormant stupidly. Could the man mean pornographic books? His manner was sufficiently mysterious for this to be the explanation, although Dormant had always understood that England figured more prominently as an importer than as an exporter of that type of literature. His own books it so happened, like those of many more worthy writers, were banned in Ireland. At irregular intervals Dormant received from a press-cutting agency, a copy of the interdiction concerning his most recent work. Only a few weeks beforehand he had seen his name beneath those of the aged Teuton, Dr. Thomas Mann and the ineffable and more medical Dr. Cronin. The name of Dormant's book stood immediately above that of another called *Plaything of Desire*. The Irish censor struck impartially but, who knew, perhaps with some deeper and more valid justice than that known to other men. Dormant liked to think that his own books might have something in common, not only with those of Dr. Mann, but also with *Star Lust . . . Curtains for Dulcie . . .* and the more enigmatic *Unmarried But Happy*: titles which he had selected at random. He thought it might be instructive, too, since a chat with the Irish censor was no doubt out of the question, to read those books, and if Mr. Mendoza was in any way concerned with their marketing abroad, he would ask him for the loan of them.

"What kind of books?" he enquired cautiously, for this was not a request which could be made openly: preparation was needed in order to show that his interest was purely scientific.

Some expression upon Dormant's face must have informed Mr. Mendoza of how matters stood for, pointing an accusing index finger, he wagged it vigorously: "I see what you are thinking," he said. "The answer, sir, is no. I have no copies of Henry Miller in my baggage and, take my word

for it, you wouldn't get more than ten pounds for the Marquis de Sade, not even in Brussels, you wouldn't. Sex is right out these days."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Dormant.

"Right out," repeated Mr. Mendoza emphatically. "Though, mind you, you'd never get a Customs man to believe it. Always twenty years behind the times those fellows. Why, I don't mind telling you they gave my bags the cocaine treatment!" Mr. Mendoza snorted with scorn. "*Cocaine!* Years behind the times. Here, have a reefer?" and he extended a package of Player's cigarettes. The tobacco inside the cigarettes was dark, and certainly not Virginian.

"No, thank you," said Dormant, who had once smoked opium in Izmir, and considered himself to be above such dance-band wares. "Mr. Mendoza," he said, "what *were* you carrying?"

"Can't tell you that, but I'll show you what I brought back," said Mr. Mendoza. From between the folds of his mauve pyjamas he produced a book. "François Villon," he said. "Poet. Heard of him?"

"I seem to remember the name."

"Worth three hundred pounds, day after tomorrow, at Sotheby's," said Mr. Mendoza. "Look at the date of the edition."

Dormant looked. The edition was that of Coustelier, the date 1728. The book was in excellent condition: "*J'en ai le deuil; toi, le mal et douleur,*" read Dormant, opening it at random.

"Those fellows are so damned stupid they don't realise that literature is worth money," said Mr. Mendoza. "Even Walter Scott. Know what I got for an original *Ivanhoe* at Fontainebleau on my last trip?"

"No . . . how much?"

"700,000 francs," said Mr. Mendoza. "The printer had mucked up three sentences in the last chapter. Made it worth double the money. Funny what people go for, isn't it?"

"Like stamps," suggested Dormant.

"Don't talk to me about that racket," said Mr. Mendoza with derision. "Too many fakes and you got to go to Amsterdam for it. I like Paris."

"I'm sure you do."

"Just one book each trip," said Mr. Mendoza. "Just one book that's all you need. Poetry's best. With prose, well . . . you know how it is . . . they don't know a thing, but they're always inclined to have a look; think they may find something dirty. But poetry, no sir: there isn't a Customs man in the world can read more than one line of poetry without his eyes going glassy. Ever read Milton?"

"Not for some time," said Dormant.

"That chap's a winner all the way," said Mr. Mendoza. "*O'er laid with black, staid wisdom's hue*," he quoted accurately, and in a mincing voice: "Now, I ask you: what does he mean? Nobody knows, sir, and that's why he's worth money."

"Do you work alone?" enquired Dormant.

"Wish I did," said Mr. Mendoza. "No, somebody else thought of this line, but he let me in on it. I got friends everywhere."

"What are you taking to Ireland?"

"Book about Cromwell. Mad about him over there. Killed a lot of them off, didn't he? That explains it. Same thing in Warsaw before the Russians took charge: Rabbis paying good American dollars for books about the pogroms."

Mr. Mendoza stubbed out his cigar. He prepared and lit a pipe. He raised the blinds. The train was passing



through Pett's Wood, first of the dormitory suburbs. Mr. Mendoza stared with commiseration at the rows of neat houses. "Poor devils," he said. "There they live, there they die, and they don't know nothing, and they never will."

"Well, they all seem to have television," observed Dormant.

"Baah," and the noise made by Mendoza, although it can only be expressed phonetically in this way, was less that of a sheep, than that of a ram in rut. "Baah . . . gadgets. I been in gadgets myself, but I always knew how to master them. I been in pictures, Mr. Dormant, and in pictures you got to know how to throw dice. By the way, like to have a little game with me now?" From his pocket Mr. Mendoza produced a red carton containing dice. The aces were uppermost.

"Not just at present," said Dormant. Then, thinking it wise to divert his companion's predatory instincts toward more anodine channels of autobiography, he enquired: "Where were you born, Mr. Mendoza?"

"Depends what you mean, Mr. Dormant. A man isn't born: he's a part of all his ancestors. We Mendozas come from Portugal, originally. The Inquisition put us out. That was more than three hundred years ago, but we haven't forgotten. I first saw the light in Budapest myself, but my mother language is German. That never worried me until I got to Hollywood. Same atmosphere as your English clubs over there: I had to have a Yiddish teacher for months, like them frigid girls they bring over from Sweden and have to teach English to."

"Were you in Hollywood long?" enquired Dormant. He had observed that when Mr. Mendoza was in any way animated, he made a grimace with his mouth which in some strange way, no doubt by a contraction of cheek flesh, caused his ears to rise almost an inch, and that inch abruptly.

This endeared Mr. Mendoza to Dormant far more than anything which he had so far heard him say.

"Hollywood?" said Mr. Mendoza scornfully. "They never asked Columbus if he'd seen the ocean, did they? I breathed and spat Hollywood for twenty years, Mr. Dormant. Did you never see *The King of Kings*?"

"No," said Dormant. "I was a little young at the time."

"Your Ma made a big mistake there," said Mr. Mendoza. "My name was in the credit titles, and not so far down, either."

"Is that so?"

"You don't believe me, eh?" said Mr. Mendoza, and he scowled at passing Bromley. "Here, take a look at this," he said, and thrust a gold cigarette-case into Dormant's hands. The number of articles concealed within the pockets of Mr. Mendoza's well-cut grey suit—and this without any outward sign of their presence—appeared to be limitless. Dormant would not have been at all surprised if the man had suddenly produced a rabbit from behind his waistcoat. He examined the cigarette-case, which was very expensive, with misgiving; it was exactly the kind of article in which he generally contrived to fracture some essential part within ten seconds.

"Open it and read the inscription," commanded Mr. Mendoza. Dormant did so: *'To my old friend, Ferenc Mendoza, from his old friend Douglas Fairbanks. Hollywood, August 1931.'*

Dormant felt himself under the obligation to make some comment: "He lives in London now, doesn't he?" he said.

"Baah," said Mr. Mendoza. "Not that kid. This was his old man. Romeo wasn't in it when it came to climbing balconies: though you'd never have thought it to see him on the set: 'Come on, Doug,' I used to tell him. 'Pull in your waistline and get up that drain pipe.' When talking pictures

first came in I had to spend hours in the sound room toning down his breathing; otherwise the fans would have got the idea that he was a four-master trying to get round Cape Horn."

Mr. Mendoza removed his spectacles. He wiped them carefully with a folded handkerchief. "But all that was long ago," he said, and Dormant was surprised to see that the man's eyes were moist.

"Why did you leave Hollywood?" he asked gently.

Mr. Mendoza looked out of the window. He cast a harassed glance at Penge. In ten minutes the train would be at Victoria.

"Not many people tell the truth about themselves," he said.

"No, that's right," said Dormant.

"Hollywood left me," said Mr. Mendoza.

"How was that?"

Mr. Mendoza placed his spectacles upon his nose. He smiled and his smile caused his ears to rise. "I'm too German. I'm half an artist, half a sergeant-major. That wasn't the right kind of combination when the new bunch of stars came in. The pictures that I made were lousy."

"I'd like to see some of them," said Dormant.

"You might if you took a trip to some hick-town in India or Ceylon," said Mr. Mendoza. "Nowhere else. My stuff doesn't rate among the bunk they call the Classics of the Screen."

"But what did you do when you left Hollywood?" said Dormant.

"I lived for fifty-six weeks in a hotel on Fourth Avenue, New York," said Mr. Mendoza. "I went out at breakfast time, and I came back around eight in the evening to put my feet in hot water. A man has his pride: might be all washed up, but there seemed no point in letting every bell-boy know



it." He looked up at Dormant and, seen through the lenses of his spectacles Mr. Mendoza's eyes, still moist, seemed more moist. "In the movie business 'when you're finished, you're finished,' he said. "It's like those boxing champs, but at least they can come out of retirement, even if it means getting flattened. But in movies you never even *start* coming back. You're dead and that's what you smell like."

Dormant said nothing. It would be an exaggeration to declare that he was moved because, nowadays, Dormant was only moved when taken absolutely unawares, which was not the present case; Mr. Mendoza's attack being purely frontal. Dormant's character was not, by nature, cold, not even in his response to the misfortunes of his fellow-men, particularly unsympathetic, but prolonged residence in the Middle East, where specious appeals to sentiment are more common than in Northern countries, had taught him the tactics of the pestered heart. His hull, his outer skin, was pierced today as easily as ever. Inward rushed the flood of fancy, with its flotsam of altruism and conceit, but the ship would never founder now: watertight doors slammed shut and bulkheads groaned, but they held, and presently the pumps were brought to work.

"The word gets around," said Mr. Mendoza. He was speaking more quickly now, and it was evident that he was speaking against time. "Or maybe it doesn't get around," he said. "Maybe you just stink and people can smell you a long way away. When the war came I took a ship to England, like those actors that kannt make the bill on Broadway any more and start talking about London policemen and Shakespeare." He thrust his cigar into the ashtray so roughly that the firm flesh of it broke, and crinkled peel fell to the floor. . . . "For Christ's sake," he said, "it isn't right, is it? Tell me it isn't right." He tapped Dormant's knee, and this time his knuckles were clenched.

"I didn't do anything wrong," he said. "I was just a bit dumb, that was all. What's so damned funny in that there's no work for Farenc just when he's learnt how to do it. I haven't made a film for twelve years, but I reckon I could make a better film now than anyone living . . . and that's not boasting either."

Dormant said nothing. The train was crossing points, had already passed Clapham Junction. The terminus lay near, perhaps no more than three minutes distant. Dormant would have liked to have risen, to have placed his baggage in the corridor, to have braced himself for the coming conflict with porters, taxi-drivers, hotel clerks and other persons inimical to his peace of mind, but he could not do this without appearing rude, and so he sat still, and scowled. He found that what Mr. Mendoza had to say was interesting, but he also considered that Mr. Mendoza might have begun to say it earlier.

"You'll discover that, too," said Mr. Mendoza. "The day will come when you, too, will have something new, something good and fine up your sleeve, and a bunch of damfool publishers will sling it to the readers who deal with the looney manuscripts '*What, that old nut,*' they'll say, '*ain't he dead yet?*'"

Dormant laughed. "I daresay you're right," he said, "it isn't so much death as oblivion in their lifetime that novelists fear." Once, when he had been a small boy, his father, who suffered from arthritis, had taken him to a French watering place reputed as curative to that ailment. ~~Daily~~ Dormant had walked from the hotel to the thermal establishment, and while his father took his sulphurous bath, received the unguent massage, his son had waited for him, playing silent games in the great tiled hall. An old man who served the sick with cups of unpleasant-tasting water from behind the bar had been kind to Dormant, and when

business was slack, had leant across the expanse of zinc, and told the boy stories in a halting but picturesque English. One day Dormant's father, emerging pale-faced and in good humour from his bath, had found the pair in conversation. He had spoken amicably to the old man and then led his son to lunch but, as they walked, instead of chatting as was his habit, Dormant's father had been silent. "I'm glad you like that old chap," he said at length. "His life has not been a happy one. I can imagine nothing more terrible than to enjoy fame briefly, and then endure a long decline through no fault of your own but just because of an inability to adapt yourself to public taste."

"Why, what did he do?" asked Dormant. His father's words were so mysterious that he suspected crime as the cause of his friend's downfall.

"Do?" His father had laughed. "He won the Prix Goncourt in 1906. That's what he did and, unfortunately, nearly thirty people have won it since."

Mr. Mendoza stood up. He had not failed to notice Dormant's impatience.

"Let me help you with those bags," he said.

"No . . . really I can manage."

"Painters are the lucky ones," said Mr. Mendoza. "Look at that chap, Picasso: over seventy and still going strong; and Titian they tell me, was over eighty when he did his best work. Well, here we are," and indeed, the train was slowing between the long, curved platforms.

"Perhaps we shall meet again?" said Dormant, and he held out his hand.

"Like nothing better," said Mr. Mendoza. "Matter of fact, I've got an idea we might be useful to each other. Lot of stories I could tell you . . . hundreds of them." He looked down, ostensibly at his watch. "Where are you staying?" he said.

Dormant hesitated, then rebuked himself. The sentiment was churlish. He had been tolerably entertained by Mr. Mendoza's antics and conversation for more than two hours. He gave the name of the hotel at which he proposed to stay.

"I'll look you up," said Mr. Mendoza. "You can count on that," and Dormant reflected that if the little man became too insistent he could always instruct the hall porters to say that he was out.

Presently, Dormant secured a porter. Their joint baggage was piled upon the man's trolley.

"May I drop you somewhere?" said Dormant as soon as he was in possession of a taxi.

"No, thanks," said Mr. Mendoza.

"Surely I can take you part of the way, at least," said Dormant, and then he realised that Mr. Mendoza, with his quick appreciation in such financial matters, might interpret this as an attempt to leave him with a taxi-fare on his hands.

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Mendoza. "You see, I live in Hampstead." That was what Dormant had thought, but he decided to make no comment which might prolong the conversation. He paid the porter and said good-bye. Looking back as the taxi sped across the busy square towards the calm of Lower Belgrave Street he saw Mr. Mendoza, much encumbered by his baggage, moving painfully across the tarmac towards the omnibus station.

"These damned Jews are all the same," he said to himself. "They'll rupture themselves to save half a crown," and he thought how very much he preferred to that race, Armenians.

Dormant would have been most surprised had he seen Mr. Mendoza five minutes later on the top of a Hampstead-bound bus. For Mr. Mendoza was crying: fat and

translucent tears ran down his face towards the corners of his drooping mouth.

"What's up, mate?" said the conductor sympathetically as Mr. Mendoza tendered him sixpence.

"I just lost my brother," said Mr. Mendoza.

## Two

THE Hotel Fragonard lies near the term of Knightbridge's many splendours, and lies upon an island site which obliged the traveller, advancing westward, to choose between two roads. He would be ill-advised to take either of them for at the Fragonard, London, as we would prefer to know it, ends. The road which curves to the left will flatter for a while, with perspectives of Brompton, but Fulham is not far ahead, and presently the first aspidistras denounce the imprudence of his choice. The road which leads to the right is flanked for some half a mile by the noble and preposterous buildings of another age; museums, it is said. Intrigued by their appearance much as must be the fly by the intricate fringes of the spider's web, the traveller advances. Five minutes later his face pales as, lifting his eyes, he reads a sign of which, like fire and brimstone he has heard much, perhaps from a nurse when he was young, more probably from vicious companions in his later years. '*Gloucester Road*'! Few men have seen that sign and returned to civilisation without grave impairment to their health and enduring chaos in their souls. And yet this is but purgatory. Hell is still a mile ahead, in Earls Court.

Dormant had first stayed at the Fragonard, with his father, many years before these events. On the present occasion he had booked a room, by telegram, from Genoa. There were two others hotels—the Greuse and the Boucher—under the

same management, and situated, so Dormant had heard, somewhere in Westminster. His father had tried them at some remote period, but had left both in a huff, denouncing their chambermaids as thieves and their waiters as avaricious slovens. As in many similar matters, his father's opinion was quite good enough for Dormant, and he would have considered it as both dangerous to himself and as disloyal to a family tradition to have stayed elsewhere than at the Fragonard. He was greeted respectfully at the reception desk, and it made him feel happy to think that his name was remembered there; which, indeed, it was, though less because of his father than because his own telegram was still fresh in the mind of the young gentleman who took down his particulars and handed him his key.

After a bath, and a prolonged examination of Battersea Power Station which was the most prominent object on the horizon as seen from his room, Dormant came downstairs. He was hungry.

The evening scene in the various lounges and smoking-rooms had not changed since his previous visit. Ladies predominated, and such gentlemen as were present seemed notably ill at ease and in a state of moral, and in some cases even physical subjugation, for crutches were abundant, and in the hall Dormant had already counted no less than four invalid vehicles.

But if the gentlemen were quiet and sipped with resignation from glasses which, to Dormant's practiced eye and from the prevailing aroma, appeared to contain Empire sherry, the ladies were lively and addressed each other in jocular voices, though an accent of brutality could be discerned when they spoke to their husbands or to the waiters. The ladies were of various ages between fifty and seventy and all, without exception, wore pearl necklaces. Many of them were dressed for dinner, and the dresses of

these were black or mauve and seemed to have been designed, above the waist at least, for figures more ample than those provided by their owners.

Accustomed to the more animated scene prevalent in Greek and Turkish eating houses, Dormant looked about him in search of some suitable feminine companion for his leisure hours. There were a few young women present, but, none returned his glance with the slightest enthusiasm and, clearly, although they must have recognised him as a man, they did not admit the purpose for which Dormant considered that man had been made. Dispirited, he sat down at a writing-desk and selecting a picture postcard representing the Changing of the Guard, he addressed it to a friend of his named Grigori Patarakis, who lived in Retimnon, Crete.

His spirits rose somewhat when he went into dinner, for although he was placed at a table with a leg so badly injured that he feared lest some catastrophe overtake his soup plate, this table lay immediately behind a pillar and a potted palm, and so Dormant was out of sight of most of his neighbours. Furthermore he discovered almost immediately that the waiter detailed to serve him was a Cypriot. Astonished and gratified at being commanded in his native language, the waiter advised Dormant to leave the soup alone and take the *Vol-au-Vent*. Five minutes later, he returned with a colleague who, he explained, wished to view the totally unusual phenomenon of an Englishman actually able, and prepared, to speak to his social inferiors in a foreign language. This second waiter was a Slovene, from Fiume, but he also spoke French, and so, partly to gratify a harmless vanity and partly for another and more subtle reason, Dormant spoke French.

He had noticed that the next dish upon the menu was sole. This is a fish which, no matter how served, must be most carefully cooked, and is almost never so in England.

Dormant's sole, when served, was beautifully done, crisp and yet tender. Those of each of his immediate neighbours was burnt.

His dinner over, Dormant was about to take the lift to his room, when a porter approached him:

"Not going upstairs are you, sir?"

"Well, yes . . . I was thinking of it."

"Television's on, you know, sir." The porter's voice was reproving. He pointed to the darkened windows of the morning-room. Dormant peered. In comfortable arm-chairs sat row upon row of the ladies, his fellow-guests. The flickering luminosity of the screen shone upon their pearls. They were watching a young woman who, with great wealth of gesture, was singing a politely bawdy song.

"Do they listen to everything?" asked Dormant.

"You bet they do, sir. Every night, too. Pay for it, don't they?"

In his room, Dormant undressed. After a last glance at Battersea Power Station he composed himself for sleep. He did not, however, attain that state for many hours. In the reception-rooms adjoining the hotel a dance orchestra was playing, and continued to play until midnight. At intervals between the bouts of music, speeches were made, which Dormant, opening his window, identified as the exhortations of various directors of some business concern, to their employees, gathered together to do themselves and the old firm, honour. The windows of the ballroom, being also uncurtained, Dormant was able to survey the scene beneath him, and he reflected that, if it were true that his father had left him a comparatively large sum of money, then he might do worse, if he ever thought of retiring and leading a quiet life, than to invest it in some respectable concern which hired clothes to the British middle-classes; for what enterprise



could be more secure in a land where travesty was required for so many occasions?

Unable to sleep, he took from the commode beside his bed the two volumes of the London telephone directory and amused himself, first by looking up the names of people whom he had known in former times, and then in making a list of friends whom he would like to see again and who, he imagined, might not be displeased to see him. The list was short. Dormant had no desire to talk about Greece, about the war, or about his childhood, and he could not suppose that his one-time friends would wish to talk about these subjects, either.

At last he fell asleep with a volume of the directory lying open across his breast, and so he did not hear the end of the ball one hundred feet beneath him; the rollicking 'For he's a Jolly Good Fellow' sung three times, the merriment which accompanied, 'Auld Lang Syne', nor the respectful silence with which 'God Save the Queen' was greeted.

Next morning at about nine o'clock, Dormant bathed, dressed and went downstairs. He was a naive man in many ways, but never so about his food, and he knew that it was the practice of the Fragonard floor waiters, all family men, to remove one item from each breakfast tray which they served to bedrooms: a pat of butter here, half a slice of bacon there, for their children would be hungry, come supper time.

After two kippers and a talk about Enosis with his Cypriot friend, Dormant counted his money. He possessed two pound-notes and a few shillings. He took a taxi to the office of his father's solicitor, Mr. Rivers, which was situated—most felicitously he had always considered—opposite to the Wallace Collection, in Manchester Square.

Mr. Rivers was both amiable as a person and, physically, a living refutation of the slander that the game of croquet is

played only by women and decrepit or effeminate men. Large and burly, Mr. Rivers had been for many years a champion at this tedious sport. He had also been a personal friend of Dormant's father, and not ill-disposed towards his friend's son until, a few years previously, he had read one of Dormant's books. Mr. Rivers had burnt this book, in the presence of his wife, whose hands he had declared he would not allow it to soil. He had burnt the book in the kitchen range of his house. Dormant had obtained this information from his father, who had considered it most diverting. Dormant did not, however, hold any animus against Mr. Rivers for the book had cost half a guinea, and from what he knew or had seen of this gentleman's reputation in economic matters, it could only have been with the deepest of chagrin and from absolute mental conviction that Mr. Rivers proceeded to destroy an article for which he had paid money.

The conversation between these two men, in so far as it concerned business matters, is not germane to this story. When it was over, and many technical details had been patiently explained to him, Dormant found himself in possession of a sum slightly exceeding two thousand five hundred pounds, and of a personal letter from his father, written two hours before the latter's death.

"Of course," said Mr. Rivers, and there was a hint of apology in his voice not upon his own behalf but upon that of his deceased client, who had ignored his advice: "Of course, the estate would have been much larger if only your father had agreed to insure himself during his working life, or at least to observe elementary measures of economy once he was in retirement."

"Why should he insure himself?" said Dormant. "Unless he has a wife whom he considers so unlikely to make another marriage as to be absolutely dependent on him, I can't think

of any procedure more calculated to warp the character of his children. He was a widower. He brought me up decently. Why the devil should he do any more?"

Mr. Rivers sighed: "I will send you a list of his investments," he said, "it may cause you to revise your opinion. Your father, I am sorry to say, was a predestined victim of every wildcat scheme which has been launched in this country in the last ten years."

"I'm sure it will be most interesting reading."

"One or two of his bookmaker's bills are still outstanding. Do you wish me to pay them, or will you do so yourself?"

"Of course I'll pay them, and I want his complete set of *Ruff's Guide to the Turf*, too. Where is it?"

"Everything is in store," said Mr. Rivers. "Nothing is missing." He rose, and held out his hand, and when it had been shaken, placed it upon Dormant's back. His nature was kindly and bonhomous, and in spite of his difference with this client upon literary matters, he did not wish their interview to end upon a note of grumpiness.

"Well," he said, when they had reached the door. "Well, I suppose you'll be settling down now?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean . . . taking a job and that kind of thing?"

"But I have a job, damn it."

"Yes, of course, of course . . . but so insecure, Mr. Dormant. You are still a young man, I know, but isn't it time to consider the future?"

"But I consider it every time I put pen to paper."

"Hum!" said Mr. Rivers. Unsuccessful so far in his adjurations, he tried another tack. "And the critics. By Jove, to read some of them you'd think they had a personal enmity for you . . . you really would."

"Perfectly understandable," said Dormant. "Nine-tenths of them are writers themselves."

Mr. Rivers became confidential. "Is it true," he said, and his voice sank, "is it true that many of them . . . well, I don't know how to put it delicately . . . are not *men* in the sense that you and I are men?"

"Some of them are women, and that's far worse," said Dormant.

Like many recently-enriched men in the England of the early 'fifties, Mr. Rivers had purchased a farm in one of the Home Counties. The possession of this farm, and of its essential concomitant, a small herd of shorthorns, enabled Mr. Rivers, as with his colleagues in another profession—the doctors, those proprietors of Daimlers, Turkish carpets and radiograph apparati, instantly used upon all save the instantly fractious—to avoid paying some part at least of the income tax which the Government demanded from him in order to make tanks and guided missiles with which to repel the annually awaited invasion of the island by Russia.

And since Mr. Rivers allowed no client to depart without some reference to his hobby, Dormant was retained in agricultural conversation on the doorstep, with a charwoman swabbing dirty water round his shoes, for more than five minutes. Free at last, he crossed the square and, entering Hertford House, he proceeded immediately to mount the marble stairs. He sat down in front of Velazquez' 'Lady With a Fan'.

"What sad eyes she has," he thought. "They might be those of Cervantes' daughter when he sent her out to play the strumpet so that he might live his last years in comfort." The morals of celebrated literary men, he reflected, had seldom been perfect, and it was some consolation to know that, even if one could not approach the more exalted members of the profession in terms of talent, one could at least never be quite so unscrupulous with tradesmen as Balzac, nor drink as much as Charles Lamb. The personal

imperfections of writers, Dormant, a loyal member of the profession, was, in any case, inclined to attribute less to weakness of character than to the inconsistency of the public taste and the well-known rapacity of publishers.

This last reflection reminded Dormant that he must presently visit and demand money, together with a rigorous account of his stewardship, from his own publisher. Although authors are invariably docile, ever timorous, when such interviews actually take place, they show, in the day-dreams during which they envisage the coming encounter, a bellicosity, a truculence most surprising in persons who claim to be artists and thus interpreters of the natural evil inherent in mankind. "*What?*" they say, if only in their head, "*only 110 copies of that book sold last year in Canada . . . and 7 in Finland. I don't believe you: a decimal is missing.*" The cringing publisher, his chicanery detected, now offers new terms, compensation, but the author, in whom the acquisitive instincts of a slave dealer are married to a stoniness of heart more befitting to a pawnbroker confronted with fake jewellery, has already perused this new document, having probably persuaded his opponent's secretary to give him one. The unfortunate girl will be sacked for this, but the author has no time to spare upon thoughts of her predicament: instantly, he points to the vital clause upon the third page which, in appearance anodine, in fact, deprives him of some part of his Scandinavian rights. . . .

It is a curious thing, thought Dormant, as he returned the sad smile of the portrait, that I once wrote a short story about that women, and even considered it rather good. He could not, at this distance of time—more than fifteen years—remember the details of the story, but he recollected that it had been concerned with the transubstantiation of souls. Dormant no longer wrote short stories, considering them to be a vulgar medium of expression. In this he showed

arrogance, but also a certain wisdom, for with his insufferable prolixity it is quite certain that his stories would have been dreadful failures.

Dormant was well aware that he must soon open the letter from his father which lay in his pocket, but he decided to go and see the Delacroix room first because for that task he would need courage and who could better provide courage than the great Romantic with his insistent and necrophilous imagery, his scarlet robes, and severed heads, his scimitars?

'My dear boy,' he read, about ten minutes later when, his interview with Delacroix accomplished, he sat down in an alcove upon the walls of which hung Bonington water-colours of the Oriental period:

MY DEAR BOY:

'Since this is the last time, in my life, that I shall write anything at all, I went to the trouble of making a rough draft of my letter to begin with. I did this, not because I have anything specially important or serious to say to you, but because I wanted to have a look at my handwriting again and to see whether, and in what way, it had changed during the course of my adult existence. Themistocles, they say, desired to possess the art of forgetting, but I am sure that can't have been the case when he was about to die.

'In point of fact, my dear boy, I find little difference in my fist as it is now, and as it was forty years ago in the form of a love-letter which I wrote to your mother, and which lies before me on my desk. This, I fear, is yet another proof of the general mediocrity of my intelligence, for the handwriting of great, and even of merely remarkable men is constantly changing, whereas mine has remained quite static.

'In the course of my life, which has been, on the whole, a

most happy one, I have never aspired to great heights, nor would it have been decorous in a man of my parts to have done so. My chief aim in life, after my marriage, was to make your mother happy, and there I believe that I succeeded. What my aim was before I met her, I cannot with any precision remember, but I daresay that it was to pass my examinations without over-exertion and thus to persuade my own father to increase my allowance. Later, as you know, my overriding ambitions were to forecast correctly the results of two-year-old races at Ascot and Goodwood and also the Autumn double; and in this latter I have succeeded on no less than seven occasions in the last ten seasons.

'I daresay you sometimes ask yourself whether, with my passion for the turf, I would not have been happier had circumstances permitted me to be more closely connected with it: as a trainer, for example. But I do not think this is so. On the contrary, I believe that, if I had been, professionally, a racing man, I should probably have hankered for the more stable (not bad that! Though the pun was unintentional) life, and the respectability of the pensionable Civil Servant employed by the Admiralty. For such is human nature! I do hope, my dear boy, that *you* hanker for nothing?

'After looking at my handwriting, I took my shaving mirror and examined both sides of my face, for it is said that the right side of a man's face represents what he could and would have liked to be, and the left what he has, alas, become. In some men the difference is amazing, even alarming: Goethe is an example of this. With other men, such as Rembrandt in the degradation of his old age, the contrast is merely pitiable. My own face presents no contrast at all.

'One thing I must tell you, and I know you will not take it

amiss: I would have liked to have had another son, or failing that, a daughter. Not, my dear boy, because you have been in any way a disappointment to me, but I think you will agree that our characters and interests are different and your brother might perhaps have more closely resembled me. For example, there are several small points about gardening, which I would have been glad to pass on, but which I hardly imagine would interest you.

‘When people say, and malevolent people do say such things, that you have been unkind to leave me much alone in these last years, I have invariably replied that it is for each man to work out his existence for himself, that I consider myself fortunate in having secured your affection, and that when we meet again it is always with mutual pleasure.

• ‘We shall not now meet again in this world, my dear son, because a few days ago, I learnt from old Austin a fact which I had for some time suspected: namely, that I am suffering from an unpleasant and incurable disease. I therefore intend, as soon as I have heard the six o’clock racing results, upon which the extent if not the actual fact of your future comfort depend, to place my head in the gas-oven or, more probably, since having rehearsed the gesture I find it most uncomfortable, upon a cushion, on the floor, near-by. I have chosen this method because it is that in which the features, although pink, are least repulsive after death.

‘I hasten to add that although the news I received from Austin has perhaps caused me to advance my decision by a few days or weeks, the outcome could not have been otherwise even if I had enjoyed perfect health. My pension dies with me. I have few principles but such as I have, I adhere to inflexibly. In the last years, in my search for a system, and in other less praiseworthy ways, I have greatly dilapidated my capital assets. I long ago made up my mind that if these should ever fall to a certain figure, with which



Charlie Rivers will acquaint you, it would be my duty to do away with myself, and gross selfishness on my part to refrain from that course. The fact is that, while I admire your choice of profession, and the courage and pertinacity with which you pursue it, the literary career is fraught with danger and a small sum will enable you to avoid, until your reputation is established, certain indignities which are inflicted upon the poor in all fields of human activity.

I close now, my dear boy. Since I cannot invent words of my own as my last message to you, I have had a look through the library to see if I could find anything suitable for this occasion and the love and hopes I have for you. I believe I have found what I want on page 356 of Niebuhr's *History of Rome*. He says:

“In a mass of utter confusion, a single spot, which others have overlooked, will often strike an observing eye, but no distinct consciousness of it is retained, because it is only an insulated fragment. It recurs to the memory, when anything else connected with it is met with, but is often only a transient light which falls upon the darkness; and even he upon whom it has shone forgets what is revealed to him.”

All facts remain accessible, my dear Adrian: it is their application which is so often lost. But I will bother you no further with my opinions of this world, for I must now make certain arrangements with rubber tubing which will transport me more rapidly to the next, if next there be. About this, I remain most sceptical, though I should be very glad to see myself proved in error, for then it might be that I will meet your dear mother, my wife, whose love has been for me the single spot in my existence, and one from which my eyes have never wavered.

‘Your affectionate father

‘ROBERT DORMANT.

'6.20 p.m. Very sorry. No luck. The outlay was only £100, so no great damage is done, though if it had come off, you would have been more than a thousand the richer. But Lingfield's tricky, especially at end of season. Attached please find details of system for 4-year-olds I have been using successfully for past two seasons. I think it best to take Rover with me. He is getting old, and would only be miserable alone. Queer creatures, aren't they?'

Dormant folded the letter. He placed it in his breast pocket. He looked up. An attendant, a middle-aged man with a pleasant face, was watching him:

"Anything strange?" said the attendant.

"No. Why?"

"Look as if you'd seen a ghost, you do."

"That's where you make a mistake," said Dormant.

"You don't see a ghost. He comes, and he sits on your shoulder, and after that he never goes away."

He left the Bonington alcove, and after a supercilious glance at some portraits by Nattier, descended the staircase. There were quite a number of visitors present on the ground floor. Dormant paid no particular attention to the throng until, obliged to halt beside a showcase in order that an old lady might pass, he suddenly spotted, not twenty yards ahead, a familiar figure.

Turning, he followed another and more devious route towards the exit. The face which he had seen had been that of Mr. Mendoza.

## Three

THERE were two women seated on wicker-chairs, beside the telephone exchange. One woman was knitting, the other, much older, was reading an illustrated magazine.

"Yes. What is your name? Who do you want to see?" said the younger woman when, having coughed twice, Dormant had begun to bruise his knuckles on the counter in an attempt to attract her attention.

"Dormant," said Dormant.

The woman was about to make some reply when her companion rose, and silencing her with a gesture, advanced. She was a big woman, and at first her chest filled entirely the small, square hole through which Dormant had been viewing the scene. He recoiled and, lifting his eyes, saw that the woman was smiling at him.

"Why, Mr. Dormant, it isn't often we see you!"

"No, that's true enough," he replied. He did not remember having encountered this woman before, but he was grateful that she should remember his name.

"Will you step into the waiting-room, Mr. Dormant, and I'll see if Mr. Glenn can see you."

"With pleasure," replied Dormant who, for the first day or two of his visits to England, rather enjoyed showing that he had been correctly brought up. At least, that is what Dormant thought, but to astonished onlookers his range of masters appeared to owe as much to the Piræus waterfront as to those, prevalent during his years of puberty, in the dining-rooms and dormitories of British public schools.

As he traversed the hall, Dormant halted beside a very fine grandfather clock. This clock had been made by Konrad in Zurich, in 1782, and apart from the actual walls of the place, was the oldest thing in the entire building, though

few people judged it tactful to say so when confronted with the Jacobean panelling of the main staircase and of the more important corridors. • On his last visit to his publisher, about eighteen months previously, Dormant had arrived carrying an unwrapped bottle of whisky. Bound, eventually, for a party, he had just purchased this bottle at a vintner's, two doors away. So frigid, so comminatory had been the stares of the ladies in charge of the reception desk at that epoch, that Dormant had not dared to proceed upstairs with alcohol in his hands. He had concealed his bottle in the interior of the grandfather clock. On leaving the building, he had forgotten to retrieve it, and when about three hours later, he had been smitten with a vague consciousness that something was missing, had not considered it wise to return and retrieve his property.

Dormant now opened the grandfather clock, but only dust and the great pendant bollocks of the mechanism were to be seen. Turning, he encountered the unflinching and inclement gaze of the firm's founder, an old gentleman who had maintained for more than thirty years that no profits were to be expected from works of fiction other than those of Mrs. Gaskell. "*Why indeed should persons of intelligence read novels,*" he had once said, and his remarks had become so widely known that it was now included in Mr. Benham's famous Book of Quotations: "*Why should they read novels when thirty men of genius can place before them different facets of a character as complex, as genial, and as universal as that of Napoleon?*"

Dormant entered the waiting-room. He sat down in an easy chair with a view over one of those dismal backyards which are known in England as areas. He watched a cat prise open the lid of a dustbin and extract from beneath a mass of page proofs the remains of a sandwich. The waiting-room itself was pleasant enough although sombre and ill-lit.

Along the walls were bookshelves fitted with locks and additionally protected by a meshwork of metal from marauding hands. From his earliest visits to the place, these bookshelves had constituted a challenge to Dormant and, on one occasion he had brought with him a screwdriver with the intention of opening them. The go and flow of people in the waiting-room was always, however, such that he had never had sufficient time to put that project into execution: nor would he have benefited greatly had he done so, for apart from a few volumes upon anatomical subjects and a collection of the novels of Strindberg such books as could be identified beneath their protective layer of dust were almost entirely of a mathematical persuasion.

Three other persons were present in the room, but Dormant felt quite sure that they were not members of his own species: well-dressed men in middle life, possessors of sock suspenders, and of brief-cases, they sat impressive, communicating neither among themselves, nor with this latest of intruders. The trio seemed, indeed, like birds of prey, perched, their grey plumage smooth, and themselves, for the moment, tranquil yet perfectly alert, as if waiting for the first camel in the caravanserai to stumble. With a thrill of apprehension, Dormant recognised these men as Travellers, members of a race so puissant that their word is law in Bloomsbury, for of what use can it be if a publisher believes in a certain book, promotes it in newsprint most dearly purchased, recommends it to such critics with whom he is not on terms of enmity, speaks of it nightly, for an entire week, over his glass of sherry at parties—of what use is all this if the man who must sell the book in Wallsend regards it as tendentious, badly written, or merely unremunerative?

A single oil painting surveyed the silent scene. This was a portrait by Kneller, of Stanhope, the illegitimate son of the

Earl of Chesterfield, to whom, for eighteen months, some two hundred years previously, this house had belonged. Until the present day, it had been the custom, among Englishmen, to regard this young man as a boorish nonentity, who had most signally failed to profit by the maxims of polite conduct provided by his famous parent. But, about three years previously, there had come into the hands of Dormant's publishers the complete correspondence of this neglected genius during the years in which he was engaged upon his Grand Tour of the Continent. This correspondence had now been published—both in a *de luxe* edition at seven guineas and, twelve months later, when the demand was at its height, in another edition, cloth bound and slightly abridged, at ten and sixpence—and critics and the general public, alike, were unanimous in their praise of this enterprise, for inset within the somewhat bald terms with which Stanhope adjured the *midinettes* of Brussels and the serving maids of Cologne to be acquiescent to his physical desires were germs of prose which his celebrated father might well have envied. Amid so much salacity, which might so well have discouraged it, the British public had shown, once again, that it knew how to recognise a masterpiece.

"Mr. Dormant."

"Yes? Good morning. How are you?"

"Mr. Glenn will be glad to see you now."

Dormant rose. He followed the young woman, of whom he was fond, because it was her practice, during the frequent absences of her employer abroad, to reply amiably to his letters—some of which were of an urgent and financial nature—counselling patience and fortitude upon his part.

Left alone, the three Travellers exchanged a series of glances, tentative at first, then increasingly significant, as they realised their community of opinion, and purpose:

"Can you sell him?" said one.

"I try to, but it's uphill work," said another. "Even when he does have a love-interest, there's always something peculiar about it."

"I can place him in the North," said the third man, his manner deprecatory.

"Come in, come in, dear boy." Dormant entered. He had not advanced two paces before he barked his shin against a portable filing cabinet which he was prepared to swear had been left there for that very purpose. Other great men, in the matter of the approaches to their desks and persons, have adopted a nudity of décor first popularised, it is said, by Mussolini. Glenn, although equally anxious to secure and retain the initiative from the outset of each interview, followed another procedure, quite as efficacious, but more in keeping with his character. Glenn's room was, in fact, quite large, yet so artfully was the furniture disposed that the intruder found himself as in a maze, and could not take two steps without calamity. It was said that a French publisher, a hard man, and one not easily given to tears, had been reduced to a hysterical condition within half an hour of entering this room.

It was said that Glenn had these various props made specially for him, and that, every morning, having inspected the list of those who were likely to call during the course of the day, he placed his gadgets in position. Nor was this all: even if the visitor negotiated these first hazards successfully, disaster would be but briefly delayed. Seated, and happy to find himself in the society of this charming man, he would cross his legs: immediately a pile of page proofs, hitherto supine on the desk, would crash to the floor in some inexplicable manner. "Don't worry, old man, I'll put them together again *when you've gone*," Glenn would say, or, if this were not enough to shatter the nerve of a man come to bargain hard, a clock somewhere behind his head would

boom out the twelve strokes of midday, although the hour might well be the bright morning, or the early afternoon.

Like some old fur trader Glenn set his traps with cunning, and with a deep knowledge of the prey which he pursued. Yet he was a kindly man, did not torture for the sake of torture but rather when his victim's nerve had finally been broken, and a promise to pay at once, to sign, or to accord the desired favour had been exacted, he would ring for his secretary and provide a cup of tea or, in cases of extreme prostration, even alcoholic stimulants.

Although Dormant knew nothing positively, he had long suspected that his natural clumsiness could not be responsible for every humiliation he had endured in that room. He entered it, therefore, with the greatest circumspection, rather as if playing blind man's buff.

He need not have given himself so much trouble because Glenn, always an artist, had found the way to disarm Dormant with a single, deadly stroke. On his desk, well in view, rather dusty, stood the bottle of whisky which Dormant had left in the grandfather clock.

"You can take it away with you," he said pleasantly. "Were you trying to nurse it, or something?"

"No," said Dormant. Invited to do so, he sat down in the arm-chair, well knowing that this was a mistake, but seeing no other seat available. Glenn's arm-chair was probably his masterpiece. Once within that velvet grip, which sloped backwards, not even a trained gymnast could have got out of it again with any show of dignity.

"Well now, how are you . . . fit?" enquired Glenn briskly, suggesting by his tone that Dormant had been training during many months for a boxing contest, or a marathon.

"Quite fit, thanks," shouted Dormant. From the depths in which he found himself plunged Glenn seemed a long



way away. So must some second bassoon, or other unimportant instrumentalist in the orchestra pit, see the Tenor, monstrously foreshortened, towering on the boards far above him.

"I read your book" said Glenn.

"Oh, did you?"

"Best thing you've done."

"I'm glad to hear you say so."

"I don't say so. One of our readers says so. Tell me," and here Glenn leant forward, and it was evident that he was about to ask an important question. "Tell me, why didn't the fellow marry the girl?"

"It would have been rather difficult, wouldn't it?" said Dormant. "I mean, considering they were alone on the island?"

"They could have been married before *God*, couldn't they?" said Glenn. "Wait!" He held up his hand, consulted a piece of paper on his desk. "Yes," he said, "on page 136 it says expressly that he had a Bible. There was therefore nothing to prevent him from reading the marriage service himself."

"I think that kind of thing is best left to your lady novelists," said Dormant, unpleasantly.

Glenn was rather proud of his lady novelists, but they were so numerous, and Glenn had been twitted so frequently about them—one rude critic even going so far as to suggest that, alone in London, he could, at a moment's notice put ~~three~~ complete hockey teams into the field—that this was, inevitably, a subject upon which he was somewhat touchy. Yet he never hesitated to undertake a trip to distant Galloway or verdant Herefordshire if there were the slightest prospect of discovering someone who could describe a vicarage childhood, a Conservative woman's club or, best of all, a dark-haired hero with a Heathcliff profile.

More sophisticated ladies—the magic name of Miss Mitford springs immediately to the mind—Glenn did not favour: indeed banned them from his list: “*I do not wish to publicise the activities of second-generation peers,*” he had once said to Dormant.

Dormant allowed himself to sink more deeply into the protective embrace of his chair. “I shall pay for that crack in a moment,” he was thinking and, sure enough, in a moment he began to pay for it.

“Now listen,” said Glenn, and placing his two index fingers together he looked at them with approval. “Now, don’t think I’m trying to influence you in anyway, dear boy. Far be it from a humble trader like myself to cross swords with,” and Glenn sucked one of his fingers, “with an artist.” If his finger had been a lollipop, and himself a child, Glenn could not have sucked it with greater appreciation. His expression was now benign.

“Yes?” said Dormant. He wondered where the cut was coming. Probably in the language employed by the Turkish fishermen, he thought: language which he had reconstructed in English with the greatest love and care. Dormant knew, that in such matters, publishers are incalculable, allowing rough men who, alas, know no better to speak today in the language natural to their station; tomorrow, obliging the author to present their conversation as that which would prevail in the back seats of a choir-boys’ charabanc outing.

Yet it was not upon his fishermen but upon a section of the book even dearer to Dormant’s heart that Glenn chose to strike: “I don’t like that diary,” he said. “You’ll forgive me saying so, dear boy: you have various talents, but none at all for metaphysics. Besides, every damned book you send us has got some kind of pantomime stuck in somewhere—a diary, a short story, God knows what. Why do you do it?”

"I don't know. I suppose it helps to pass the time."

"Well, it may do for you, but it doesn't for me. Nor for readers either. That diary will have to come out."

"Oh no, it won't," said Dormant.

"Oh, yes, it will," said Glenn.

"If you touch that diary," said Dormant, "you're not getting my signature on any bloody bit of paper."

"Don't be stupid, Adrian. What do I want your signature for when we have an option on the thing already?"

"That diary is the only good thing in the book."

"You think so? Well, stop biting your lip for a moment: I thought your heroes never gave their enemies anything but a cold stare. Take a look at these."

In spite of the apparent untidiness of his desk Glenn was always able to find, immediately, any document which he required. He selected three pieces of paper and offered them to Dormant.

"The top one is our reader's opinion," he said.

"—— your reader," said Dormant.

"Oh, come now, I'm sure you wouldn't want to do that if you knew all the trouble he goes to correcting your grammar."

Dormant read what the reader had written: the man's opinion was extremely unfavourable.

"Well, it's his opinion against mine," he said complacently. He respected the reader who had, indeed, improved the delivery of his past subjunctives upon several occasions, but the man's very anonymity made defiance more easy.

"Read the other bits of paper," suggested Glenn.

Dormant read them. The first carried the opinion of a novelist whom he greatly respected, the second that of a critic who had shown him some kindness. Both suggested that he should withdraw the diary from his book.

"You think of everything, don't you," he said, and he glowered at Glenn.

"I try to, Adrian, I try to," and Dormant reflected that, although the old fox certainly had infinitely more important matters awaiting his attention than this one of removing twelve pages from a book of a minor author, the little comedy in which he had been able to indulge, while doing so, had probably made the joy of his entire morning. Dormant was still angry, but his look at Glenn contained affection.

Glenn possessed many enemies, and he was proud of the fact. He knew, also, that enemies are seldom lifelong enemies, and tend to sink into apathy and indifference unless goaded afresh from time to time. This, Glenn never failed to do. He could detect a gossip instantly, and he employed these persons as Napoleon did his information service, and so intelligently that men the other side of London always heard within half an hour when he had said something unpleasant about them.

Bloomsbury is a part of London in which it is easy to lose oneself, and in which taxis are rare, but they were not rare outside Glenn's publishing house. Thirty yards away stood a permanent, if unofficial, rank: the drivers of these vehicles having discovered that, in the course of the day, at intervals of half an hour, agitated or excited men would cross the road, and demand to be driven with all speed to distant parts of the metropolis.

Glenn had never done anyone a bad turn in his entire life: except verbally. His enemies were one and all victims of his acid tongue, and when one investigated each separate feud it would be found that some act of pomposity or some declaration of a pretentious nature lay at its origin. Literary men, and those who employ them, are peculiarly liable to foolishness of this kind because their physique

and general appearance are so frequently dispiriting.

But, even the inveterate duellist, who will provoke a quarrel merely so that he may feel his hand upon his sword, does not always despatch his adversary with a pretty thrust. Glenn's nature was fierce, even passionate. He had fought against hypocrisy throughout his entire life and now, when there was no hypocrisy to be found in his immediate neighbourhood he was obliged, having grown used to the fight, to forage in search of it, so that the peculiar, thoracic bellow, the '*Myer Gaaard*' which was an infalliable sign that he was about to charge, was often heard in fields where the innocent grazed more numerous than the guilty.

Many people mistook Glenn's perpetual irony for irony's more prosperous relative: rudeness—and there were moments when the family resemblance was strong—but although this turbulent man did not always handle the weapons of his armoury felicitously, the fact that he possessed an armoury at all was proof that he remained the constant enemy of cant, and Dormant was not disposed to blame him if, when a fight was on, he seemed to breathe more easily.

Now, having achieved an immediate victory in the matter of the book cut, a more cruel man might have pursued this subject with the intention of teasing his victim and, indeed, since Glenn was always tempted by danger and had never yet seen Dormant in a villainous temper, he *might* have raised the odds had he not wished to make his opinion clear upon a more important subject:

"I was sorry to hear about your father."

"Were you?"

"I suppose you'll be writing a book about *that* now, will you?"

"No."

"Well, I didn't think you would, really, but I know how

you dash into things. A book about your father would be a great mistake."

"Would it be also too much to ask you to change the subject?" said Dormant.

"I'll change it in a moment when we've exhausted it," said Glenn. "Did he leave you any money?"

"Christ," said Dormant. Not for the first time he wondered whether what Glenn sought, as others seek peace of mind or the Holy Grail, was not a good smack on the nose.

"I was only thinking," said Glenn mildly, "that if he did leave you something, you might buy a new suit."

"Since you're so damned interested," said Dormant, "yes, he did leave some money, and do you know what I'm going to do with it?"

"Not give it to me?" said Glenn. "Dear boy, I always knew you'd show gratitude. And so we are to publish you henceforth at your own expense? But this is wonderful . . . wonderful."

"No," said Dormant. "I'm going to set up as a knife-grinder. I won't make much to begin with, but I can wait. On the day you publish your memoirs I shall make plenty of money."

Glenn grinned. Actually, it was most unlikely that he would write his memoirs, except perhaps privately, and for the guidance of his sons. As is the case with many publishers, Glenn would not have entered this profession had he regarded literature merely as a marketable commodity, but, at the same time, it is not possible to read manuscripts for thirty years without suffering a goitrous growth of the critical faculty to the near-exclusion of all other feeling. Tea-tasters are said to suffer from the same disability; they call continually for coffee, and regard with aversion the beverage which provides their livelihood. In his youth,

Glenn had read widely and with discernment, but now, except in the line of duty, he read little except Thucydides, Voltaire and the Weekly Hansard: this latter delighting him because, in spite of its vapidity, it did represent the *spoken*, as opposed to the written word.

Many of the greatest names in modern literature were little more than names to Glenn. Worse, they were the means of identifying irksome and self-important people whom he had been obliged to meet at parties. They were the names of people published under imprints other than his own. He would read one youthful book by such people, forecast their future and, ten years later, glance at a novel of their middle period to see whether his prognostications had been confirmed. And they almost always were confirmed.

As soon as he felt himself to be in a position to do so without giving offence, and could obtain the necessary personal material, Dormant intended to write a book about Glenn, for the man's character, and the central problem with which he could be observed wrestling endlessly, were fascinating. This problem, briefly put, was one of power, of dynamism. Some men, spurred by ambition and the knowledge that their abilities are superior to those of ordinary people, climb the tree of life with steady grip, rising from branch to branch until, at last, they survey the world from the tree's topmost summit. Such men are happy men. They are satisfied. They have expressed themselves.

But other men, no less able and often more thickly intelligent, climb quite as nimbly but these do so, not because they desire success for its own sake—they take success for granted—but because it is boring to sit still and there is within them an insatiable energy which can be expressed in no other way.

On the lower branches of the tree the atmosphere is sc

smelly, so noisy, that even refined persons, devoid of genuine ambition and possessed of a low metabolic rating, are impelled to mount at least a few branches higher. At the top of the tree the atmosphere is not smelly, but the noise is as great. Here no one listens to what his neighbour may be saying. Life is duller than expected on the perch on the top of the tree. The clear sky above, still quite unattainable, seems to mock the huddled group of men who have achieved the climb; therefore, certain bold spirits who have not yet had their surfeit of risk, undertake, since they cannot climb higher, to crawl *outwards* along the flimsy lateral branches. Some of these succeed and cling there perilously, executing many a gymnastic exercise in order to maintain their equilibrium. Others are not so fortunate: the branch snaps, or they themselves lose hold. In either case their bodies hurtle to the ground.

That Glenn was dissatisfied with the results of his endeavours and regarded his London life as no more than a languid charade was evident to Dormant. Not being a man of any great perspicacity except in so far as his own character was concerned, Dormant, with that categorical impudence which is the portion—perhaps even the impulsive force—of all novelists, might well have abandoned the study of his patron at this point, but, about two years before these events, Dormant, halting at Marseille when England-bound from Greece, had been invited to take luncheon with Glenn at the latter's villa near Agay. Dormant had received this invitation because he had taken very good care to inform Glenn of the date and place of his arrival in France. Having lived for a great part of his life in absolute obscurity, and, subsequently, so distant from his native land that he could neither share the passing enthusiasms of its inhabitants, nor observe their fortunately perennial eccentricities, Dormant had been terrified of the encounter. He could not hope to



compete with the kind of brittle conversation in which the English excel, that Wildean gossip wherein subjects are covered as mares are covered by stallions—with indifference and for a moment of pleasure. He was afraid that, awkward in his Cretan reach-me-downs, and awkward in his table-talk, he might prove disastrous in the house of this man, for whom, even then, he felt a certain rehabilitary affection.

Dormant need not have worried, and might well have spared himself the two double brandies which he drank during a five-minute stop at the buffet in Toulon station. He was met at the station by Glenn himself, immediately distinguishable, in his blue overalls and private air of taut health, among a crowd of heavy-breasted men wearing Hawaiian shirts.

"Hullo, Dormant. Glad to see you. Now, tell me: is it a fact that you know how to dive for sponges?"

"Well," replied Dormant uneasily. "I did put something about that in a book but——"

"My boys are very keen to see you doing that. I've found a good place with good depth and a diving ledge. How long can you stay under water?"

"About twenty seconds," said Dormant miserably.

"Oh, come now, you can do better than that if you try, can't you? Come on; we've some way to walk . . . you did buy a ticket, I hope? None of your heroes seem to think of it."

They had, indeed, some way to walk. Like many men who have read in popular newspapers that fat may threaten both the heart and the health of the athlete who lets himself go. Glenn was determined to take his muscularity with him into middle life. He walked, quite relentlessly, at a speed of four miles an hour, and when Dormant, trying on the ancient dodge of the breathless, paused, and attempted to admire the view:

"Don't waste time, Dormant. You've described it all a dozen times, and besides, there's a cliff in the way."

Later . . . much later, while Dormant, still coughing up sea water attempted, with an unsharpened knife to pierce the carapace of a tough leg of duck, he overheard Glenn's two sons discussing his character with their mother.

"We gave Mr. Dormant the air-gun, Mummy, but he only hit the target once, and that was an outer."

"Mr. Dormant is tired, dear."

"Mummy, why doesn't Mr. Dormant wear a bow-tie?"

"People don't in France, dear. They don't know how to tie them."

"But, Mummy, I thought all authors wore bow-ties?"

"No, darling. You're thinking of people who work for the B.B.C. and your father."

"Mummy, I think Mr. Priestley is much funnier than Mr. Dormant."

"That's quite true, darling, but you didn't know Mr. Priestley when he was Mr. Dormant's age, did you?"

"No, Mummy, I wasn't born then."

"Mr. Dormant will be nice, too, when he's fifty," said Mrs. Glenn. "If his liver's all right," she added prudently, and she looked at Dormant.

Dormant had got his piece of duck under control now, and forkfuls of flesh and stuffing were flying between the plate and his mouth. The bronzed domestic Buddha, Glenn, sat immobile at the head of the table, though from time to time his voice was heard requesting a slice of Roquefort, or a third banana.

Surveyed himself, Dormant himself surveyed the scene and, six months, later saw it in perspective.

Some people, envious people, members of the crabbed minority, declared that Glenn would always be the actor-manager and the mummer: standing, feet astride, with a

straw spotlight on his chin and chest, a Hamlet handling authors' skulls while some lisping Fortinbras, grumpy and impatient to pronounce the three lines which complete the play, waits in the wings.

That was not an opinion to which Dormant, upon reflection, could subscribe. A man sits down at a desk. He is quite alone. In adjacent offices sit his colleagues. Their names, too, are printed on the letterhead, but his stands first. "*I am like,*" Glenn had once said to Dormant, "*I am like the political chief of some great department . . . the Admiralty, the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Pensions. The responsibility is always mine until there is a change of Government.*"

It is foggy, muggy cold and foggy, off the Newfoundland banks. Shall we reach St. John's tonight? The passengers queasy, uneasy, in their bunks, are reassured when they hear the chug-chug-chug of the pilot's boat. The pilot climbs aboard. His face, beneath the dripping sou'wester is the face of Glenn.

In the First World War, when Glenn had been a serious young man who intended—he did not much care how—to carve a great bow-wave through too placid waters, he had been, successively, an army sniper, then a tank driver, and, finally, a pilot.

It is customary to hear successful business men bewailing the fate which keeps them tied to centrally placed and heated offices. Their favourite reading of such persons is the back page of *The Times* newspaper upon which the announcements of estate agents are displayed. A Georgian residence near Huntingdon, an island in the Hebrides? How they long to chuck up everything and to lead the simple life, with muddy boots and a gun-barrel kissing the cloth of their old tweed jackets.

Yet, when they do retire, these Cincinatti die quickly, and from overeating brought on by excessive boredom. Glenn

was an exception. Having achieved everything which he could materially desire by his forty-fifth year, he now took no more than a routine and paternal interest in his business. Throughout the week, Glenn lived in London, but come Friday afternoon his car sped northwards towards his country home in Suffolk and here, attired in blue dungarees, he shot rooks and discussed the aberrations of Wyandottes with the local peasantry. He did not imagine, at such times, that he was a farmer or a country gentleman. He was quite simply content to spend his week-end in peace, and out of reach of authors.

It is possible, however, that Glenn did retain one secret ambition. This was to be created a baronet, less for himself, than because that unpretentious and hereditary title would be something which he might pass to his eldest son. Knighthood, though he could hardly escape it, interested Glenn much less, for he considered the sacrifice involved in the public exposure of his first name—it was Aloysius—deserved higher recompense than to see himself placed upon the same level as building contractors and Trade Union officials.

Glenn had been watching Dormant in silence for some moments. Now he bent forward:

“You’re coming to lunch with me, of course?” he said.

“Am I?”

“Oh, yes. We’ve quite a lot to talk about.” With a deft, movement Glenn flicked upwards a disc on the house telephone. “Will you come down here, please?” he said. There was an answering grunt, then silence. Presently, a tall, thin man with pessimistic features entered the room.

“Ford, Mr. Dormant is in England.”

“So I observe.”

“Ford, d’you think you could jolly the evening papers into carrying something about Dormant?”

"They're very sticky just now, Mr. Glenn. They wouldn't even take what I sent them about Knight Shevel's aeroplane. Has Mr. Dormant done anything interesting?"

"Yes, he's been fishing for sponges. Diving for them. He might have been killed."

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Glenn."

"Tell them," said Glenn, and he stroked his nose reflectively. "Tell them that if Dormant had been alive at the time, it would certainly have been one of his sponges that the soldiers handed to Our Redeemer."

"Which sponge was that, Mr. Glenn?"

"The one dipped in vinegar, when He was on the Cross."

## Four

DORMANT had rather hoped that Glenn would take him either to the Garrick or to the East India Club. In either of these places he would have received a square meal, served in comparative privacy. Instead, the Daimler bore them towards the *Belladonna*, a restaurant frequented by stage people, where the meat was as tough as the actresses who hailed each other with shrill cries across the room, and the *Canalones* looked, and tasted like slugs which have been exposed to the dissolvent powers of some powerful garden insecticide.

But the wine, a *Moulin-à-Vent* of an occupation year, was excellent, and far down on the menu beneath the list of fruit sundaes, Dormant found mention of *Reblochon*, a cheese to which he was partial and which, when it was served, he found most suavely gamey.

Throughout the first part of the meal Glenn said little; content, apparently to survey his guest with an expression of

ironical paternalism. Occasionally he roused himself to point out some celebrated mummer or some promising crank. When the meal was over, he leant back comfortably on the *banquette*, and crossed his legs:

"Do you keep a diary?" he said.

"Certainly not," replied Dormant, outraged.

"Well . . . a journal, a notebook, then: call it what you like?"

"Good heavens, no."

"I think you ought to consider doing so."

"Why?"

"It's very useful later for one thing. You just scribble a few lines every day and put them away in a drawer. In next to no time the pile is so big that you have to break the whole desk down to get it out."

"I haven't got a desk," said Dormant. "Besides, what would I write about?"

"My dear boy, something is always happening. The Prime Minister dies, the Shah of Persia is murdered. To jot down your appreciation of these great events is to show that you are a child of your Age."

"But I don't want to be a child of my Age."

"That's neither here nor there, dear boy. In twenty years time when you publish your notebooks people will have forgotten all about the Shah, and even if you were strikingly wrong, all you have to do is to change the text a bit. The other day I was reading a selection from the diaries of French writers during the occupation. The unanimity with which they hated the Germans and prophesied their downfall is astonishing."

"I thought you were always saying that the function of novelists is to entertain?" said Dormant. He could not imagine that anyone would ever be interested in his elucubrations concerning political matters.

"So it is, dear boy," said Glenn, "so it is. But one must also keep abreast of modern thought. In our Spring List we have a novel by a Baptist who's become converted to Judaism. Nothing could be more up-to-date than that now, could it?"

"Did they circumcise him?" said Dormant.

"No," said Glenn. "In real life unfortunately, the chap was done at birth, but of course in the book he wrote a chapter describing the rite. Very realistic. It made me squirm. People like a novelist who seems to share their problems. Would you care for some more coffee?"

"Yes, if I'm not wasting your time."

Glenn ordered more coffee. "My dear boy," he said. "I'm putting money in my own pocket, because I'm going to reform you. Shall I tell you another reason you should keep a journal?"

"There seems no handy way of stopping you."

"It draws off bile, dear boy. Tell me, did you have trouble with your landlady when you were living in Rhodes?"

"I did," said Dormant.

"I thought you must have. In your book, when the fellow is quite alone on the desert island and should, by rights, be looking for firewood, there are suddenly three pages of diatribe about cabbage soup and old women with hair on their chins. Another thing . . . that boil on your back: very interesting, but don't you think it would have been much better if you'd written to the *Lancet* about it? Heroes *mustn't* have boils, my dear Adrian. They may have asthma, or Parkinson's disease, or quiescent syphilis but they must *not* have unsightly and minor ailments which remind readers too forcibly of their own afflictions. People are always prepared to read about death because they are not yet convinced that they themselves must die, but

if you describe a common cold you will have a whole host of lady critics shouting for your blood."

"I'm sorry," said Dormant. "Personally I meant it to be rather touching the way the girl looked after him, heating seaweed to make him iodine, and so on. After all he might well have died of septicæmia, you know."

"I wish he had, dear boy. I always like it best when you go off the stage and come on again as you think you should be."

"Damn you," said Dormant sententiously. "Do you talk to all your authors in this way?"

"You are mistaken if you think it impertinent," replied Glegg amiably. "David Herbert Lawrence was just as tiresome as you. I was constantly putting evidence before him which proved that gypsies are frequently impotent and navvies coarse and unsatisfactory as lovers, but he wouldn't believe me."

"Now, at last, I understand why he wrote that stupid book, *Lady Chatterley*," said Dormant. "You goaded him into it."

"Not at all, dear boy. One of the odd things about publishing is that after you've been at it some time you can always be pretty sure which way an author of any individuality is going. I told Lawrence in 1927 that he would write that book and, sure enough, he did so two years later."

Dormant grinned: "And supposing the joke was on you?" he said. "Supposing he wrote it to guy you?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt that was his original intention, old boy, but when an old earthy emotional gets hold of a subject like that it goes to his head . . . just like a tippler with a bottle. He takes a sip or two and swears he'll be good, but in less than fifty pages he's roaring drunk with the mossy romance of it all."



"And what does your instinct tell you about me?" said Dormant.

"Oh, a great many things, my dear Adrian. To be quite frank, I rather prefer you personal writers. It's as good as Mr. Pepys: a coal-heaver can't be rude to you without us hearing all about it. Then from the many metaphysical pages which follow, we guess at once that you have become involved with the coal-heaver's daughter. Finally, and most piquant of all, somebody we know comes back to England and tells us that it was not the daughter at all whom you most abjectly failed to seduce; it was her mamma. . . . Later, of course, you arranged things a little so that you could show yourself to your public in a more pleasing light." Glenn sipped his coffee: "By the way," he said, "did I tell you that I knew your father?"

"You know perfectly well that you did not."

"I met him several times at his Ministry during the war."

"Did he like you?"

All "That's so difficult to judge with your family, isn't it? I can really say is that he played a very good game of bridge in office hours and was stingy with his drawing-pens." Glenn put down his coffee cup. He clasped his hands on his knees. It is said that strong feelings do not suit the English and that their abhorrence for sentiment springs from the knowledge that their faces, already somewhat pink by the course of Mother Nature, become rapidly red under the stress of emotion. It is said that strong emotions, inside Englishmen, are in very much the same situation as Jonah inside the whale. "I consider that he made a very brave death," said Glenn, and he stroked the base of his spoon on the table-cloth. The spoon was wet, and so it made thin, dirty marks, never quite straight. These marks were first brown, then grey, then, finally, there was nothing, and

they were white, a scored line on old and inferior linen.

"Do you know," he said, "I can think of a lot of things which are very droll, but I can think of one thing which is not droll at all."

"And what is that?" said Dormant. It was just the same as when people yawned; never was he able to prevent himself from yawning, too. Now, he had begun to play with his spoon, imitating Glenn. A waiter advanced, smoothed the table-cloth, spilt a little salt which made a little pile, and yet which most signally failed to remove the coffee stains.

"For a lazy man," said Glenn, "it's never very funny when the impulse of his youth is dead, and only talent, which is a hard ~~one~~, to be struck at for ten hours with a pick, remains."

Dormant remained silent. Within himself, he was wondering whether Glenn might not be about to commission him to write somebody's biography. Glenn was known for his biographies and jealous rivals had said that one of Glenn's ancestors had travelled specially from England in order to obtain the Memoirs of Judas Iscariot. These same people maintained that, far from having committed suicide on the date mentioned in the Holy Book, Judas had not done so until several months later, when he had finished and corrected his manuscript and spent his advance. They added, of course, that there had been quite unnecessary misunderstanding about the thirty pieces of silver, and that these had actually been provided by Glenn's forbear, together with the halter.

Such malevolent tittle-tattle did Glenn something less than justice. Of course, it was true that at the close of the late war he had cornered all the soldiers, capturing American generals by the dozen at their ranches in Texas, while his emissaries, brushing the guards aside, burst into many a prison camp, there to secure the signature, upon prepared contracts, of grinning Japanese and dejected Germans: but,

as Glenn himself declared with a sincerity which it was impossible to doubt, he had pursued this policy less for commercial than for altruistic reasons. 'I am the greatest pacifist of them all,' he would say. 'I hold something more powerful than any atom bomb in my hand, yet I do not throw it.' The bomb to which Glenn referred was the correspondence course in elementary grammar and literary procedure which he had caused to be mimeographed for the service of generals about to write books. Dormant, left alone in a room for five minutes, had once read, in haste, the entire third page of this remarkable document. It had been an exhortatory page, full as a fig is of seeds, with maxims and edifying examples.

*'Remember the writing of Cromwell,' he had read. 'Study those of Lord Macaulay and learn from these great men that such military reputations as have survived the pitiless assault of time are not such which have been tarnished by public remembrance of an incautious word, a vulgar phrase. . . .'*

Do not, therefore, write, for example: *'Ike told me he was nuts about the Saarland, thought some of the big houses as good as any on Long Island, and the miners, although on the weedy side, almost as reliable as Pennsylvanians. . . .'* Write, instead: *'The Commander-in-Chief invited me to share his simple breakfast. "Ah, the Saar," he mused, as he broke a waffle. "You seem sad, sir," I put in. "I am sad, indeed," he said. "The Saar is the cockpit of Europe." . . .'*

"What are you thinking about?" said Glenn now.

Dormant told him, and Glenn laughed. "My dear Adrian," he said. "One can't expect you to be in touch, I suppose, but generals have been about as much of a draw as cold blanc-mange for three years now. Of course, I don't say I'm not keeping my eye—even giving a retainer—to a few promising majors at the Staff College, or Fort Leavenworth. Our future Wellington, I always say, will be

something of a fop, and will wear canary-coloured waistcoats beneath his service dress while he talks to you of electronics." Glenn paused. He looked about him. Since the hour was now almost three o'clock few people remained in this restaurant. At a table by the door a young man wearing a Brigade of Guards tie had just risen and, oblivious of his feminine companion's efforts to extricate herself from the twin hazards of a glissant table-cloth and falling cutlery, was discussing some item of his bill—possibly the service percentage—with the waiter. "*My Gaard,*" said Glenn. "Look at that now: that's what we're coming to; a race of middle-class *tricotours* with baggy trousers made in Bond Street and no manners."

Dormant examined Glenn curiously. He had not failed to observe that the man's roar had lacked its usual resonance: "I always did think that hard times would come for you traditionalists," he ventured.

"They came twenty years ago," said Glenn. "More coffee," he shouted at a passing waiter. Then, taking hold of the neck of a water carafe: "Not a week passes," he said, "without the widow of some damned Clydesider or temporary gentleman from the City bringing me her husband's memories of Snowden and the General Strike. Do you realise that, when I die, I shall bear the frightful if indirect responsibility of having represented Baldwin and Ramsay Macdonald to the future as great men?"

"I'm surprised you seek my sympathy in such a matter," said Dormant. "I don't wish to adopt a revivalist attitude, but you publishers are entirely to blame for your own misfortunes which are, in any case, rather those of a troubled conscience than of cash."

"Every man can write one book, they say," said Glenn, mildly.

"Certainly, any damned fool can write one book," said

Dormant, "but unfortunately your contracts are made out for two."

"My dear Dormant . . ." said Glenn. He said this slowly, drawling each syllable and, meanwhile, he examined Dormant even as a heart specialist who had clapped some complicated leather apparatus counting the uneven beats upon a cringing forearm might have examined his victim. "My dear Dormant!"

"Yes?" said Dormant, immediately alert.

"Go on," said Glenn.

"No, you go on," said Dormant.

"Very well. My dear Dormant, is it in my interest to see you cut off that long nose to spite that pink face?"

"I really don't know," said Dormant. "I suppose we'll have to wait until your summer book list to see that, won't we? I always used to be rather proud of my place in your index. There were only three of us D's. One of the others was an anthropologist, and the third a bird fancier. I always flattered myself that, being in the middle, I kept the peace between them." He gave Glenn a glance of wan but indisputable pride. "I had better sell my work, henceforth, to the Antelope Press," he said.

"For God's sake don't do that," said Glenn. "I only bought them a month ago, and haven't got them organised yet. Don't be sulky, Adrian. What are you writing about?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course I do, dear boy. Tell me all about it."

A great feeling of despondency now descended upon Dormant. Thus, it had been in order that he might explain his projects that he had been invited to luncheon. He gazed at Glenn miserably. As with all writers Dormant was inclined to consider his personal defects of technique as virtues. "I write from the heart, not the head," he would say in his fortunately rare moments of pomposity. When

Dormant had finished a morning's work he never re-read what he had written but, laying down his pen, rushed from the room, the café, or the ship's cabin which was the scene of his daily stint, and spent the rest of the day in other pursuits. Yet, since he was, spasmodically, a reading man, it would often happen that he would have in his hands the work of some great master of his craft, or even that of one of his intelligent contemporaries. Writers, like everyone else, can read for pleasure and instruction, but there is nonetheless within them a sly dog sleeping; though, in Dormant's case, the dog was not a jealous dog. It is said that conjurors enjoy nothing so much as to watch a performance by one of their fellows. The conjuror knows, of course, in theory very well how the rabbit or the selection of silk handkerchiefs have sprung from the top-hat, but, in practice, he is as intrigued and as mystified as the most ingenious member of the audience.

It is the same with writers who—unless they are prompted by those motives of spite and envy which the overcrowding of their profession and the goading of their critics render all too widespread—are bound in the natural course of things to admire the happy phrase of their dead or living rivals, to chuckle pleasurably at the small feat of legerdemain which reveals the accomplished craftsman, and to pause and then read again, and yet again, the great descriptive sweeps which show that a man has reached, and is walking with a fine abandon, on the summits.

But in Dormant's case these impulsions of enthusiasm were often annulled by considerations of a private and painful nature. "By God," he would say, laying down the book, "this fellow can write." But then he would add, overcome by gloom, "I bet he sticks at the job all day, too, and corrects and re-drafts into the bargain."

For Dormant never rewrote, and the only serious

corrections which he made were those to his proofs, sharing this latter habit with Balzac who ruined two publishers by the expenses to which he put them resetting and reshuffling pages of type. There was, however, no fear that Dormant would ruin Glenn for even as the sum of human wisdom grows so does that of people who exploit it, and for fifty years now printers have been instructed to charge excessive corrections to the personal account of the author who makes them.

If Dormant had difficulty in preparing a synopsis, he was even less able to describe coherently and orally the proposed subject matter of one of his books. In the course of a decade it was inevitable that he should have attempted, upon occasion, to do so. Inspired by wine, by an incautious request, or by one of those moments of holy enthusiasm in which writers believe—mistakenly beyond doubt, but with a sincerity which is touching to observe—that they are in tenuous communication with imponderable forces greater than themselves, he would begin to tell his tale, and gathering confidence and momentum as he proceeded, would perhaps have continued to babble indefinitely had he not, on every such occasion, observed in the eyes of his listeners that peculiar glassy stare which is the distinctive sign of genius, of manic depressives and persons undergoing an ordeal by annihilative boredom. Then, his enthusiasm withered, Dormant would stumble in his narrative, blush, and fall silent until his interlocutor, only too glad of the opportunity of doing so, changed the conversation.

The ordinary hard-working, humdrum and—it must be admitted—personally somewhat unglamorous British novelist does not receive, unless he is sufficiently famous to interest autograph hunters and ladies of the upper-middle classes who need a promoter for some charitable project,

more than two or three dozen letters a year from persons unknown to him, on the subject of his work.

Yet, among these thirty-odd letters, a very high proportion will be from correspondents who write for the single purpose of pointing out to their victim misprints in his book, errors in historical matters to which he has made reference or, quite simply, contradictions in statements which he has made.

Dormant seldom failed to receive his three letters a month from such persons. He possessed among other unfortunate ticks of style a habit, when he found himself unable to describe, adequately, some minor character in one of his books, of declaring that the man was tall and thin (or short and fat) and to lend this assertion the weight and depth which it so clearly lacked, he would proceed to describe, almost always in pejorative terms, the town in which the character lived or was supposed to have been born. As a consequence Dormant was frequently in receipt of indignant letters asking him why he had chosen to insult Swansea, or Leeds, or Marseille or Kalamata, and to state whether, since his description of their geography was so inadequate, in actual fact, he had ever been in these towns at all.

Other correspondents, methodical men, invariably cited chapter and verse as proof of even graver accusations. 'P. 54,' they would write. '*You declare that his mother is dead, yet on p. 233 she is apparently alive. Are you a spiritualist, sir. . . ?*' Such unkind remarks caused Dormant a deep chagrin: to such an extent that his hands would tremble when he saw a letter in an unknown fist, with a provincial postmark.

Although Glenn was well aware, both of Dormant's intellectual limitations and of his almost sublime sloth and aversion for hard work, only once had hard words been exchanged between the two men on this subject. In a certain book, with a comparatively English background, Dormant



had drawn what he no doubt imagined to be a portrait of a well-known dramatic critic. The temper of this man was notoriously testy by reason of the gout from which he suffered. The critic had no particular animosity against Dormant, but he hated Glenn who had declared in public, several times, that he did not believe that he had ever kissed the hand of Bernhardt. He accordingly made preparations for a libel action, and Glenn was obliged to quieten him with circumlocutory but efficacious threats. The critic did not wish the two or three thousand people who patronise London first-nights to know the exact manner in which he had acquired, for example, his heirlooms of Ellen Terry. A revelation of that kind could have been, for him, infinitely more damaging than Dormant's disclosure of his nocturnal activities. The critic, therefore, desisted. A few weeks later, Dormant was so unwise as to visit England.

"Since you have only met the man twice and are quite unqualified to assess his character," Glenn told him, "then I do consider that the least you could have done for us would have been to give him a bladder disease and a penchant for nursemaids, not Guardsmen. Why write the truth; it's always so sordid."

Dormant was disconcerted. He considered the attack to be unjustified: "After all," he said, "I did little more than describe some of his manual eccentricities."

"Aren't you going to tell me about your books?" Glenn said now to Dormant, who had been playing with a peppercorn for the past three minutes, and waiting to do so.

During the past five years Dormant who, quite rightly, had little confidence in his own judgment had fallen into the habit of consulting Glenn, either personally, or by letter, before beginning a new book. A heavy registered envelope would be laid one morning on Glenn's desk. Glenn would examine this envelope and the many pictures portraying

heroes of antiquity and modern Greek generals which embellished it. Of course, it took more than a few stamps to impress Glenn who had authors on his list who lived in places as remote as Samoa and Iceland, but if he was in a good mood he would order the envelopes to be given to the doorman of his firm, who had a paralysed and philatelic child. Then, opening the missive, he would begin to read. "I do hope he hasn't sent me the plot of *Madame Bovary* again," he said once, to his secretary.

There is a little story, instructive, and less well-known than it should be, concerning the two Dumas, father and son. This story was most pertinent in so far as Dormant was concerned. The elder Dumas, whose name had been for many years a glory in the theatre, was present at the first night of his son's first play. He sat alone in a box. He did not leave his seat during the interval. His face was impassive. It was impossible to discern his thoughts.

Later, much later, when all the champagne had been consumed and the leading lady informed that she must sleep for that night in her own bed, the agitated author being in no condition to accommodate her, the latter drew up a chair, and sat down beside his father, who as yet had said no word, either of praise or of blame:

"Papa, do not torture me. What did you think of it?"

The old man smiled. He laid his hand on his son's shoulder, even as he had done in former times when about to congratulate him on winning a prize at school: "But it was excellent, my dear boy, most promising. I think you will go far." Here he paused, and looking his son deep in the eyes, he added: "But there is one terrible thing and you must cure yourself of it, or all will be over between us."

"What is it, Papa? Speak . . . I adjure you to do so."

"My son, in your first act a gentleman appears before us. He arrives carrying an umbrella. A servant relieves him of

this impediment but, called elsewhere by the necessities of your dialogue, he places the umbrella in a corner. We stare at the umbrella. We cease to follow the fireworks of your wit. 'Hal' we say, 'it is raining outside.' Furthermore, this umbrella is quite certainly of other than meteorological importance: even if it is not employed to assassinate the hero we shall see it again, in the third act perhaps, when, if my son's devotion to Scribe still holds good, a *constatation* of adultery will take place . . ."

"Papa . . ."

"My son, we never do see your umbrella again. We leave the theatre wondering what has become of it. We go sadly to our *fiacres* convinced that it has been the victim of the most terrible fate which can fall to the lot of any theatrical prop, removal by a scene-shifter. My son, do not introduce umbrellas unless you intend to make them work for you."

Although Dormant had never heard this story, his professional activities seemed to be inspired by a tenacious defiance of the moral involved in it. Dormant's books were littered with umbrellas of all shapes and sizes, from unnecessary characters to essays on subjects as diverse as spiritualism and the future of atomic warfare. It was, indeed, hardly surprising that Glenn should suggest that he should, henceforth, divert the torrent of his superficialities into the safe obscurity of a notebook.

"I know I'm horribly prolix," he would reply when Glenn took him to task for these eccentricities. "But there are certain advantages—even you must admit that. By page 200 of any book of mine I've become so hopelessly involved, with so many loose ends lying around that I simply have to get cracking in the last five chapters if I'm to clear up the mess." And, indeed, even critics who were markedly allergic to Dormant, would sometimes admit that he was a man who provided a strong finish.

*"It is possible," wrote one of them "that this author is possessed of more subtlety than a casual study of his work had hitherto led us to believe. Overcome by boredom I was about to lay aside his last novel when a Puckish surge of curiosity caused me to pick it up again and to read the last two pages. To my astonishment I learnt there that the heroine, far from becoming a nun, as five chapters of sacerdotal matter had led me to believe, had instead married her second cousin, a young man to whom the only reference which I could discover in the earlier part of the book was an aside stating explicitly that he was scrofulous and therefore, one would have assumed, a highly unsuitable candidate for wedlock . . . Mr. Dormant, whatever his faults, does possess the charm of providing us with the unexpected. Nor is it other than charitable to suppose that if his readers have not the least idea where they are being taken, their guide is in fact following, despite all evidence to the contrary, a chartered path known—alas—perhaps only too well to him. . . ."*

"Your trouble," Glenn said to him now, observing that Dormant was still mumbling, sulking, and playing with the pepper-pot, "your trouble probably dates from that foggy day around Christmas time when you were given the *Jungle Stories* of Kipling as a reward for your mnemonic proficiency in the matter of English history. You were aged about ten then, and as the train took you home, the cows in the fields seemed to bow to you."

"In view of subsequent events I wouldn't be surprised if they did bow," said Dormant. He wondered if he would ever be able to explain to Glenn the situation on those peccant mornings when it all seemed blocked, when, knowing quite well that it was there, no means of excavation seemed possible.

"How many of us are there in England?" he said now. "Two thousand? Three thousand? Four thousand?"

"There are slightly more than three thousand persons in Great Britain professionally engaged in the production of

literary works," said Glenn. "And approximately one hundred and fifteen of them, of whom forty-six are on my books, write quite well . . . in my opinion, in no way worse than a similar number of people did in any other period of our history."

"Then what I would like to do," said Dormant, "is to get those three thousand people up at dawn and seat them, desk to desk in some large, drab, bare place such as the Albert Hall—but without blotting-paper or spare pencils lest they try to pass each other notes—and behind each of them I would place a man holding a loaded Colt with its muzzle nibbling into their necks."

"And what would happen then?" said Glenn.

"Well," said Dormant. "First of all we would put a bullet through the necks of every man and woman who had written books about shots fired in anger when they had fired no shot in anger themselves."

"You can't bring the affairs of your country to a dead stop in that way," protested Glenn. "Several excellent weeklies would cease publication."

"The convert Catholics I would spare," said Dormant. "We might have to knock off the little fellow in the West Country, but that would almost be doing him a favour because it would help him to meet Sir Thomas More more quickly in Paradise. As for the rest, so long as they can prove that, within two weeks of birth, they handed off the Cow-and-Gate and demanded a drop of holy water, they're quite safe."

"But what would be the object of this gathering?" said Glenn.

"Damn it: I thought you'd grasped that," said Dormant. "Why, to prove that on the first draft I write the best draft. Of course if the ———s were given time they'd start to correct and rewrite. But that will be nipped in the bud

immediately: in fact, no one will know, pink, blue or Faber, until it is announced from the rostrum, what the devil they're going to write about."

"The idea is tempting," admitted Glenn, "but if you will recall, your own immediate task is to write me 90,000 words before next April, on any theme you choose, though preferably not one which deals with bandits in Greece. Now would you mind telling me what you propose to do about that?"

"The trouble with you Shylocks is that you don't seem to have heard about meat rationing," said Dormant. "You expect a pound of firm flesh in an age of brisket and lights."

He began to speak about the two books which he had in mind. At first, he spoke hesitantly, watching for the glaze to appear in Glenn's eye, but when this did not occur, he grew bolder.

"I want to write about a house," he said. "It is an old house, and it would be in Guernsey or Jersey because although for various reasons, it must not be far away from England, I prefer it to be in British territory. In this house lived for twenty years an old, and, in his modest way, a celebrated man. He was perhaps a retired judge in or a Governor of one of the Colonies. He dies and his estate, and in consequence the house, too, is divided among his three daughters who are now themselves women in late middle age."

"And, gentle women, too, we trust?" said Glenn. "I can see I shall have to give you a pamphlet about death duties. Am I right in supposing," he added, "that these ladies have made marriages of unequal brilliance: that one is very rich, one poor, and the third not a pleasant character at all?"

"I wouldn't say that," replied Dormant. "There is nothing morally wrong with her: she is merely an enthusiastic Christian Scientist."

"Dear me," said Glenn. "Well, it is an old publishers' proverb that the best story of all is Cinderella. And what happens next, please?"

"Stop grinning at me," said Dormant. "I daresay even *Hamlet* sounded stupid when Shakespeare described it to Burbage." He drank a glass of water. "The daughters were all very fond of their father in their different ways," he continued. "After his death they visit the house. For now they must decide what to do with it. One is a business-woman: she would like to instal a manageress and turn the place into a private hotel. The second, the Christian Scientist, is living in the past. Her two sons were killed in the war. She would like to live in the house herself and turn it into a shrine. The third and poor one would prefer to sell because, her husband not being a publisher, she has difficulty in paying the school fees of her numerous children."

"I trust these children won't appear in the book," interrupted Glenn. "I have already followed your adolescents into far too many shrubberies."

"They will appear once, in church at a Confirmation scene. As a matter of fact I intend to make that scene the key to the novel."

"Oh God," said Glenn. "You fellows don't ever seem to be able to get away from the surplice and chasubles. I suppose the Bishop who confirms them is a whited sepulchre, too? Don't tell me he is the real father of one of the kids? Don't tell me that, for Ibsen's sake?"

"Well, no . . . of one of the daughters, actually," admitted Dormant miserably.

Glenn grunted: "The way you go on," he said, "one would think that every penny I gave you was paid out in affiliation orders. Why do novelists invariably describe the crimes which they haven't the courage to commit personally?" He shouted once more for the waiter. "More

coffee," he said, then: "Well, go on—what happens next?"

"That's not important," said Dormant superbly. "I shall deal with that as I write . . ."

"Well, don't unfrock the Bishop, for God's sake."

"Ah, shut up, will you?" said Dormant. "D'you want to hear what I've got to say, or not?"

"But naturally, dear boy. Now where were we . . . Ah, yes, the three ladies, somewhat past their first youth, alas, are visiting their father's old home. This is Chapter II, I take it, and the eldest girl is about to open the old, cobweb-covered door of the box-room."

"How did you know that?" said Dormant, astonished.

"My dear boy, it's quite clear to me that there are going to be innumerable flashbacks, so presumably they have to discover faded photographs of themselves in ballroom dresses, and dance-cards, and undeveloped negatives showing Papa's Skye terrier, and so on? Am I right?"

"Certainly, the book will take place upon different levels of time," retorted Dormant with dignity. "That's not the point. What they principally discover are *papers* which place the past in an entirely different light."

"Now don't tell me the old fellow was a rascal, too?" said Glenn. "I was beginning to take quite a fancy to him."

"I refuse to continue while you mock at me," said Dormant.

"Mock? Dear boy, nothing further from my thoughts. Tell me, will there be an old Nanny, too: that would make it even more like *Wuthering Heights*. Don't think I'm against this blood and thunder stuff, mind you, but are you sure you can handle *two* villains?"

"Not only shall I now stop speaking," said Dormant, "but I shall recast the whole book, and write it quite differently just to spite you."

"That mightn't be at all a bad idea, dear boy. If you'll



excuse me saying so, you were never much of a hand at drawing women."

"What's this bloody nonsense you're talking now?" shouted Dormant, outraged. "Not good at drawing women? What about my Sonia?"

"Come, come! Hardly yours, dear boy. You told me she was a tart in Salonika and that she wrote it all down for you. Take my tip and turn these sisters into brothers: three crusty old bachelors, fond of a glass of port and pinching a girl's bottom . . . now with that you could really do something, Adrian, believe you me. Excellent material with which to attack the middle-classes, too, and you know you like nothing better." At this point Glenn's coffee was served. His right hand held the spoon which stirred the coffee, but with his left hand he began to tap, gently, at Dormant's curved back. "I was only teasing, you know," he said.

"I don't like being teased," said Dormant. "It's just as much of a dirty trick to laugh at a man who's trying, however imperfectly, to explain his book to you as it is to imitate a man who stammers."

"You're quite right," said Glenn.

"What?"

"I said you were quite right. I apologise. Now tell me about the other idea you had in mind."

"No, I don't want to."

"Tell me all the same, Adrian," said Glenn. A short silence ensued. Dormant made no reply. Glenn took hold of his arm. "Listen," he said. "Put yourself in my place. Every day I see a dozen of you: the rough, and the queer and the smooth. No one reproaches the giraffe his camouflage, do they, or the tortoise his shell. I have adopted the manner which my doctor tells me is most likely to give me a reasonable chance of reaching seventy . . . and when you've adopted a manner you don't divest yourself of it at will . . .

just like that," he clicked his fingers; a brief sound, sharp, like the clap of a castanet. "Not even when you're most sincere, you don't," he said.

Dormant remained silent. He was looking inside himself, listing the wounds. As a boy he had been able to sulk for two whole days at a time, refusing food, too: a considerable achievement in one who was gluttonous by nature.

"Adrian," said Glenn. "Let me tell you something. You'll start to move up when you start to be indignant about yourself, and stop being indignant about others."

Dormant looked at him. "That's rather a good remark," he said, "I think I could use that."

"I expect you will, Adrian. You're becoming very de-personalised, and that's a bad thing for somebody whose personality was designed for strength. If you don't like the game and haven't the wind and the guts and the endurance to play in it, at least stop being a mere touch judge. Now tell me your story."

Dormant began to tell it. It was a poor and rather naked little story. He had considered writing it because the ending was so magnificently ironic. It was also a perfectly true story. He had observed it unwinding itself over a period of some months, and had even taken a personal, although a minor part, in its evolution.

The story involved a North American family of the middle-classes: a father aged fifty, who looked rather like a bleary schoolboy after his first drink, a mother, two or three years younger, who was a woman of some charm and originality, and a daughter, aged twenty, who possessed the particular kind of vapidty which is best exemplarised in the portrait of Anne Brontë, and who had just graduated from a perhaps adequate but certainly unfashionable college somewhere in the upper reaches of New York State.

In the First World War the father, volunteering before his

time, had become an air pilot. He had never reached the front in France, but there were few pilots in those days, and not many of those who reached the front survived the conflict. After the war the father had become something of a local hero, and had made for himself a successful career first on the staff, and eventually as Editor of various aviation magazines. This man, who had been brought up very rigidly, in the Baptist faith in one of the States of the Middle West, earned about \$10,000 a year, lived, in his own apartment, in the New York City suburb of Yonkers, was a member of a country club, and was able to send his daughter and his stepson to what he considered to be good schools.

The stepson, whose rôle in the story was to be that of a family Cato-the-Censor, was, in the year 1949, when the story opened, a military student at West Point Academy. This young warrior was the product of the brief but legal union of his mother with a young Government employee in Washington: a man ill-paid in his lifetime, and ill-served by fate in the manner of his premature death. One afternoon in 1924, in brief, he was extracting a paper from a large card-index file when the file lurched and fell upon him, causing multiple thoracic fractures, and death: two years later his widow married the airman-editor.

Early in 1949 this man, the second husband, for some reason which Dormant had never been able to explain satisfactorily, but which he could not but admire, took a strange decision. He resigned his remunerative employment, left his apartment, and announced to his startled wife and daughter that they, with himself, were sailing on the next boat to Europe. No member of the family had visited Europe before, nor was any one among the trio conversant with the geography of the Mediterranean basin.

At this period, Dormant was commercially engaged in certain seaborne operations between the Southern Italian

port of Monopoli and the Greek island of Corfu, and for the convenience of both himself and of those persons who employed him, he had taken up residence in the small town of San Bernardino, which, unfrequented by Customs officials, lies a few miles inland from Bari, in mountainous country of great beauty where many of the older houses are built in the form of cones. George Gissing visited this province, and was charmed by it.

In the bar of the ship which was bearing him towards Europe the American father met, while himself somewhat drunk, a compatriot, even more drunk, who had been born in a village named San Bernardino which lies on the Venetian Gulf not far from Trieste. There are eleven townships named San Bernardino in Italy, and if confusion subsequently arose as to which was the right one this fact must be attributed to the obnubilatory effects of Bourbon whisky. Waking next morning—the last aboard ship—the American father remembered the words of his overnight friend. San Bernardino, he had been told, was the most beautiful place in the whole of Italy and in all probability in the whole of Europe, also. To San Bernardino he would therefore go.

When Dormant first saw this man arriving, very dusty, and as things turned out, rather short of money, too, at the solitary *Albergo* in San Bernardino, Puglia, the obstinate American had already visited six San Bernardinos and this was his seventh, and last. "*I kannt try any more,*" he said, "*Mamie won't stand for it.*" Mamie, of course, was his wife.

Having heard the outline of the man's story, Dormant had been prepared to admire him. To abandon one's home, one's job, to dispose of one's only capital—an insurance policy—and to embark with two dependants for an unknown continent, and for a small place in an unfashionable part of that continent because a casual friend had recommended it, this seemed to Dormant the apotheosis of

courage and of the pioneering spirit. He was not even greatly disillusioned when he learnt that the American had done all this because a literary agent in receipt for a handsome fee had persuaded him that he could earn his living as a writer.

In England, literary agents are peace-loving men, who make no claims to deep knowledge of the art which is their merchandise, but instead pocket with a certain style and elegance the ten per cent which is their due. Often, even, they promote the interests of their clients at cocktail parties when they find themselves within shouting distance of the editors of ladies' magazines, but in America things are quite otherwise. In America the literary agent is a Mephistopheles and every man who yearns to write about a Baptist childhood is his Faust. Gradually, as Dormant who himself lodged in the *Albergo* watched the increasingly haggard faces of the two women, he grew to dislike this man who had sacrificed their present happiness to selfish ends. In San Bernardino there were only two places of amusement beside the weekly *séance* at the cinema. One was the bar of the *Albergo* itself. The other—in which the two women would not have been welcome—was the brothel.

The requirements of his business obliged Dormant to spend much time away from San Bernardino. He was frequently absent in Brindisi, occasionally as far away as the Ionian islands. Upon his return to the village, he was sometimes informed that the American trio were absent. This meant, he knew, that the women had struck, demanding more positive entertainment than games of chess in the restaurant, and that the father, increasingly apparent as a weak man beneath his bluster and chaff, had yielded, taken them to Rome or to Naples.

But always . . . always . . . they returned to San Bernardino, and Dormant, reflecting upon this strange

course of conduct, was obliged to believe, finally, that there—in that ugly little town—they had found another Yonkers, a kind of home.

Upon their return from one such expedition, the American, who was on friendly, although by no means intimate terms with Dormant, gave him the manuscript of his book, with the request that he should read it.

Dormant had been awaiting, and dreading this development and, in order to protect himself so far as was possible, he had removed from his hotel bedroom—which he knew the two women were in the habit of searching when, as so often, they had nothing better to do—all trace of his own literary activities.

Dormant received the man's book with a happy smile, but his heart was leaden. For some hours, he could not bring himself to read this work, and went, instead, for a long walk in the hills. When he returned to the *Albergo* he saw that the American was standing on the balcony, looking down at him, with an accusing stare.

That night Dormant did read the book. It was very bad; so bad indeed that, in spite of his determination to do so, Dormant had the greatest difficulty in finishing it. An author may write badly. He may be ignorant of grammar, of syntax, of spelling; he may be a stupid or a bigoted man, he may be ignorant of nine-tenths of what Life has to offer himself and his fellow-creatures, but, if he has something to say, and a personal way of saying it, then he will never, however imperfectly he may express himself, be entirely a bad author.

This man had nothing to say, and his attempts to express himself were entirely inchoate.

"I'm sorry, but it's very bad," replied Dormant, when, the next morning, the father knocked on his door and made enquiry.

against two frenzied and resolute<sup>c</sup> women? Dormant capitulated: he spent two afternoons in shabby surgeries and waiting-rooms in Bari. At last he discovered a doctor who agreed to the girl's proposition.

The girl had, from the first, consented to accompany her father, and once her shame was removed did so gladly. Her mother had no such intention. This unfortunate woman, ignoring such impediments as the fact that divorce does not exist in Italy, was sincerely convinced that the baker would leave his wife and live with her. With the consummate art which women can display in such matters, she contrived a quarrel with her husband which, beginning with some quite minor point at issue, ended with a declaration on her part that she intended to remain in Italy. The husband replied that she might do as she pleased, but she need expect no more of his money. She slapped his face in the dining-room. He threw his plate of *minestrone* in reply.

The baker, very naturally, had no intention of leaving his wife, whose plentiful charms he much enjoyed comparing with those, more meagre yet undeniable, of the *Americana*. The baker was pleased and flattered to possess a foreign mistress, whom he believed to be rich, and he considered that things might well remain as they were for several years, provided the lady, in return for his services, could invest some of her money in his business.

The husband and daughter duly left for Naples and their transatlantic liner. The mother did not even say good-bye to them. She remained locked in her bedroom until she heard the train leave the station. . . .

\* \* \* \*

"Yes—and what happened?" said Glenn. "Did you ask her to marry you?"

"No," said Dormant.

"Well—go on. I don't say I'm breathless, but I want to know."

"As soon as the father got back to the States," said Dormant, "the son came into the picture. He must have suspected something. Anyway, he sent his mother a series of letters which might have been written by a Pilgrim Father."

"Did they work?"

"Not at first: not until things came to a head with the baker."

"You mean when he discovered she had no money?"

"Yes, I think the man's ardour had been cooling for quite a long time. She was nearer fifty than forty, you know. When she first asked him to pay her hotel bill it was the end. He refused even to see her again."

"So that was the finish of her, was it?"

"Not a bit of it. You don't know women. She hadn't been in that baker's house for nothing. She knew in which wardrobe he kept his money. One night when he was out with his wife at the cinema she broke in, scooped the lot and made for Naples, and a ship. She took more than two million *lire*."

"And the baker?"

"I always did tell you an author's calling was dangerous," said Dormant. "Look!" He bent his head, parted his hair: a jagged white scar was visible. "Some of the baker's friends did that," he said. "They seemed to hold me responsible. So, incidentally, did the son when he arrived."

"Oh, so he turned up, did he?"

"Yes. He must have passed his mother in mid-Atlantic. I can't take off my shirt here but if I could, I'd show you the scar on my ribs. He was middle-weight champion of the American Army. I can't tell you what I went through . . ."

"Possibly not," said Glenn, "but I'm sure you'll be able to



tell it to a nice sheet of paper." He grinned at Dormant. "What about the father?" he said. "Did he end up in the gutter?"

"You ought to have been able to answer that one yourself," said Dormant. "No, he wrote a travel book, of course. I'm surprised you haven't heard of it. I believe it won a Book-of-the-Fortnight prize."

Glenn chuckled. "So everyone was happy?" he said. "I suppose they all came together again."

"You bet they did. But that isn't everything. The best is still to come."

"Don't tell me the son married the baker's daughter?"

"No," said Dormant regretfully. "Though I confess I've been playing with the idea of making him to do so. What actually happened was very much richer."

"Well?"

"Well, you know that Americans come and go in a flash. They never seem to stay very long in Europe. There is even some law, isn't there, which makes them liable to lose their citizenship if they persist in expatriation."

"There is," said Glenn.

Dormant cleared his throat. Although a poor *raconteur*, he was aware that suspense was necessary if he were to build up his crowning effect. Glenn sighed. He looked at Dormant with impatience, as well he might, for he endured quite enough of this kind of prevarication, in print, in the stories of Maugham and his imitators:

"A Chinese coolie arrived with a litter, and then everyone became a yogi?" he suggested.

"This man had been ten months in Italy," said Dormant, too preoccupied with his story to pay attention to Glenn. "Of course he didn't know more than ten words of the language but that was an asset when most of his countrymen only knew five. The State Department became interested in

him. When his book was published they knew they had to put him on the payroll." Dormant paused. He cleared his throat again. The effort caused him to cough, this time quite genuinely. "That man," he continued, "is now in receipt of \$25,000 a year as an expert in European affairs. He lives abroad, at his Government's expense."

"In Italy?"

"No," said Dormant, "in Turkey, and in the last letter I had from his wife she informed me that her new lover owns one of the smartest cake-shops in Ankara. What do you think of that?"

"I should say," said Glenn, "that she must be fond of dough."

"Good heavens," said Glenn presently, and the Sleeping Beauty, roused at last from her couch, could not have expressed greater surprise at the passage of time. "It's five o'clock. I must fly."

"Don't let me keep you," said Dormant politely.

"You won't. But there's one thing I must say before I go . . ."

"Yes?"

"Your story is quite amusing, but it just won't do, dear boy."

"Why ever not?" said Dormant, much crestfallen.

"For a dozen reasons: too worldly, too static, for example, and perhaps most of all because it's too much your *type* of story. Be bitter, be sweet, but take pity on the reader's palate and don't be both at once."

"I suppose you think I'd have trouble writing American dialogue?"

"Nonsense, dear boy: anyone can fake it and, besides, even Boston Irish try to talk like Harvard men these days. No, the point is that it should be *about* Americans."

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing in itself. I know quite a number of novelists who, with many a bow and scrape, make a point of bringing in Yankee characters in order to puff their sales over the Atlantic. But not you, I hope, Adrian. Now listen. Your last three books have been about Greeks, and the one before that about Wogs or Albanians; I forget exactly which. Why don’t you write about your own countrymen for once?”

“What do you want me to do?” said Dormant. “Settle down in Barssetshire?”

“I could think of worse ideas, dear boy.”

Dormant looked at Glenn incredulously, yet he knew the man well enough to realise that, like the fables of the great La Fontaine, Glenn’s conversation was sprightly and fanciful, but as with those fables, it never failed to conclude with a moral.

“Listen to me,” said Glenn. “I am like a man who lives in a little hut on the edge of the Tarpeian cliff. In my time I have watched many writers more distinguished than yours dragged by to destruction, by a howling and ignorant mob. They were writers who had remained the slaves of ideas which they had themselves outlived or who, alternatively, had made the mistake of thinking that some mere hobby was their real mission in life. I saw Conan Doyle flung over the top. It was entirely his fault! I had warned him to give up spiritualism and go back to Holmes. Even his greatest admirers can’t deny that the messages he sends us from the other world are rather pessimistic. I saw Bernard Shaw whistle by in his old age. They had pulled off his beard. Even in his last moments, airborne to oblivion, his chief failing as a man found expression and I distinctly heard him shout something about his Peruvian royalties. These were big men, Adrian, and you are a little one, but their lesson applies to you.”

him out, damn it," said Dormant. "One can only write  
putting the things which one sincerely feels."  
that perfectly true, but if you allow yourself to get stuck in a  
generalization you will live without a view of the ground on either  
\$20 off that rut. How do you know that if you climbed up  
above the edge you wouldn't feel something quite different?"

"Precisely what are you getting at?" said Dormant.  
"This, dear boy. You possess inventive powers. I daresay  
you could write something quite adequate about a collision  
of worlds, or an invasion of bees from Mars if you chose.  
You do not choose because, presumably, like all the other  
famed novelists I know, you consider that our times are  
too serious for mere entertainment?"

"Oh, come now," remonstrated Dormant, "I must be the  
only man on your list who doesn't believe he has a mission."  
"Only because the others are more honest, and admit that  
they have one. A novelist writes, in the last resort, about the  
things which he sees happening around him. Now what  
happens around you . . . there is a strike in the Pelo-  
ninese, and some workmen are killed; a Turk in Cyprus  
strikes off the niece of a Greek Orthodox priest and there are  
religious and racial troubles as a result. Of course, I don't  
say that these events are without significance, or even that  
the way men behave and think in Wigan or Leeds are  
strikingly different. What I do say is that your books are  
becoming more and more by-products of your private life.  
They illustrate your general theme—yes—but their setting  
and atmosphere are due to the hazards of your wanderings."

Dormant made a grimace. "You could say that about  
the greatest," he protested. "You could say it about  
Dostoevsky."

"Possibly—but Dostoevsky had roots: they were in  
Russia and in the darker half of men's subconscious. Where  
are your roots? Can you deny that if you were offered some

amusing and profitable contract in Abyssinia tomorrow, in two years time I should receive a competent manuscript about cattle-raids on the Eritrean border and the adulteries of bedchamber ladies at the Court of Haile Selassie?"

"But what d'you want me to *do* . . . what are you driving at?"

Dormant had no objection to discussing *himself* for hours at a time, but when the question of his work was raised, seriously, he felt that some indecency was taking place. He was rather like a hospital patient who will talk to the night nurse with great frankness about his early loves and struggles but who, when the woman requires him to bare his stomach so that she may change the dressing, grabs the sheets, recoils with outraged modesty.

"One thing you could do," said Glenn cruelly, "is to catch up with your English lessons. You've been talking Greek so long that sometimes it's difficult to tell whether you're writing in your native language these days."

Then, perceiving that, this time, he had wounded Dormant deeply, he continued, more gently. "My dear boy, the novelist's is not an easy life. Like the crossing-sweeper he is useful to society but he must not expect people who walk along the road which he has cleared to doff their hats to him. He is easily misled, and most easily of all by success or by the temptation to perpetuate some formula which proved momentarily successful. He is not even the best judge of his own talents and abilities—unless he is so fortunate as to possess a wise publisher he may make the most terrible bloomers: indeed I can see he is about to make them."

"So what do you want me to do?" said Dormant gloomily. "I describe you two books. You kill them stone dead. Be constructive for God's sake."

Glenn rose: "Come along, dear boy. I'm sure that frightful whirring noise means they're about to bring a

Hoover in here." And, seizing Dormant's arm, he propelled him towards the deserted vestibule.

"Let things slide," he said. "Don't go anywhere, or if you must be active, try something different. Become a re-crossing-sweeper for a few months. It does none of you muscular exquisites any harm to see how the lower Social orders live . . ."

He was about to say more when his attention was attracted by a man who stood engaged in conversation with a waiter at the other end of the vestibule. "Why, look," he said, "there's Maurice Welsh over there. How very opportune. Do come and say 'hello' to him," and, without further ado, he led Dormant across the room.

"Maurice, you rogue; how are you?"

The two men shook hands.

"I believe you know Dormant?" continued Glenn maliciously. "Poor Dormant. I'm striving to save him. He has struck such a bad patch, and is growing *stale*." The sibilants of Glenn's alliteration resounded in that empty room.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Maurice Welsh politely. He looked at Dormant, and his voice was charged with injured innocence. "You never write to me now, Dormant," he said.

"No," said Dormant. "I don't."

"Well, I must leave you both now," said Glenn, and his voice held the peculiar heartiness of the man who, about to leave while the going is good, knows also that he leaves trouble behind him. "What were you doing here, anyway Maurice?"

"I just dropped in to book a table for dinner," said Maurice Welsh. He continued to stare at Dormant.

When Glenn had gone—and he went through the swing-doors with the abandon of a globule of mercury released

from a fractured thermometer—Dormant and Maurice Welsh continued to stare at each other. Probably, neither man would have found anything to say had not the head-waiter approached at this moment, and plucked Dormant's sleeve.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but although Mr. Glenn signed for his bill, he appears to have forgotten his five cups of coffee."

Dormant paid the thirty-seven shillings demanded of him, without demur.

## *Five*

"ARE you going anywhere, especially?" enquired Maurice Welsh, as they emerged into Cork Street.

"Never," said Dormant.

"Come along to my office, then, and we'll have a chat."

"Office?" said Dormant, astounded. Although quite out of touch with current literary affairs, this was the first intimation he had received that novelists now possessed offices.

"You've been in Greece a long time," said Welsh, presently. He appeared not to have noticed Dormant's astonishment.

"Yes."

"You never answered my letter asking you to join the Authors' Union."

"It arrived at a moment when I didn't have the money for the subscription," said Dormant.

Welsh looked at him sharply: "You mustn't neglect that kind of thing, you know," he said. "Why don't you join now?"

"I'll think about it," said Dormant, but he did not really

want to join the Authors' Union. Dormant did not want to pay excess postage on mimeographed reports of interminable committee meetings, nor to be advised of the terms upon which he must insist when about to sign a television contract. He could not hope to profit by the advance information with which such organisations entertained their members, such as the fact that £1,000 would shortly be offered by a Belfast paper for a novel with an Ulster background. An American publisher, thinking to do him a kindness, had made him a member of one such body about a year before. Ever since Dormant had been deluged with masses of paper which his landladies invariably confiscated for ~~his~~ twice in their water-closets, and in which he was required to answer innumerable questions, some of them offensively personal, such as demands to know whether he used an after-shaving lotion, or would be prepared to take the loyalty oath. Dormant had replied only once: this had been when required to state what make of typewriter he used. He had answered that it was well-known that he wrote with a pen clasped between two of his toes.

But if Maurice Welsh saw signs of dissent upon his companion's face he did not allude to them. Instead, his grip upon Dormant's arm tightened. He pulped the bicep muscles affectionately, and when he spoke his voice was gentle. "Even if you didn't want to reply to me in my capacity as Secretary of the Union," he said, "you could at least have written to me personally."

"I've often wanted to," admitted Dormant, "but my letters are always either sentimental or pompous. Everyone except young ladies is better off without them."

"I suppose you're angry because I don't review you," said Welsh.

"Certainly not," said Dormant sharply. "The idea never entered my head." Nor had it.



"I would if I could," continued Welsh sadly, "but when I can't praise then at least, unlike some others, I prefer not to blame." He squeezed Dormant's arm once more. "You're on the wrong tack, you know," he said. "What makes it so silly is that there isn't even a breeze behind you now. The wind is blowing from quite another direction."

Dormant suppressed a desire to reply that sailing in tricky waters was certainly an art in which Welsh was proficient. Instead, he dropped half a pace to the rear, and studied the man who had made this singularly fatuous remark.

Maurice Welsh was in his early fifties but, as often with men who have been delicate in childhood and intermittently ill throughout their youth, the temperate habits first imposed by the sick-room had served him well in later life. He now looked many years younger than his age.

Welsh belonged to that most remarkable generation of British writers who attained their majority a few years after the First World War. Born two miles north of Berwick-upon-Tweed, and thus on the very borders of two countries, Welsh possessed family attachments in both, uncles in Edinburgh, commercially employed cousins in Sheffield, the opportune aunt in London, seat of temporal power. This circumstance of origin, as was the case with Seneca, had proved most useful to Maurice Welsh throughout his career. Had he been a prominent athlete there can be no doubt that the selection committees of Scotland and England would have most hotly disputed the right to place their national jerseys upon his shoulders.

Welsh was no athlete but, coached by Huxley who disdained personal participation in such an infantile game, he had won his half-blue at chess. He was, even then, renowned in various manor houses within easy reach of Oxford, for his amazing powers of mimicry and for the abnegation, and the wit, with which he would caricature the

speech of persons who talked in much the same language as his immediate ancestors, exploiting the patrimony with which the accident of geography and a paternal change of residence had provided him. In later years when the British Broadcasting Corporation required, in various moments of National peril, a speaker who could pronounce English with the slurred vowels which alone might reassure the anxious North-East, they called upon Welsh, much as they called upon the great Priestley to calm Yorkshire and the hysterical South.

Dormant had been four years old when Maurice Welsh was writing his first published poetry. Some of that poetry is still read today. Fragments of it are to be found in various modern anthologies. It is very simple, and it is very fine poetry; its subject matter is simple, too: the sight of a hawthorn, in flower, in spring; two kisses, received within the space of an hour by a boy, the first from his mother, the other from his sweetheart; a wounded starling, too sick to move, watching a robin pecking at crumbs thrown from a kitchen window by a hand raw from a lifetime of scrubbing, and the present bite of caustic soda crystals.

There must be some reason, thought Dormant now, in 1952, as they walked together up Bond Street—some secret need of some even more secret reassurance to drive a man who, at his maturity, showed all the evidence of a placid, unsensational, but enduring talent—to make such a man devalue, and devalue again the currency he issued.

Of course, Dormant knew very well what unkind persons said about Maurice Welsh. Such persons—who were themselves only too vulnerable upon every point of their indictment—said that Maurice Welsh had made arrangements with Mammon because he possessed three sons and wished these sons to have a particular, and particularly expensive education. When they said this the unkind persons always

laughed because the story ended with a most ironic twist: each of the three sons, in his turn, had won a scholarship so resplendent as to make the sacrifice of his father's principles, for cash, superfluous.

Dormant had been ten years old when Maurice Welsh had begun to publish the trilogy of novels which first brought him fame. They were novels of childhood. They narrated the story of a small, sickly little boy surrounded by innumerable female relatives, in a coastal town, in the North of England. In the second, and most remarkable of these books, the boy, accompanied by a fisherman, and his own sisters, is stranded while picnicking—owing to bad weather—on one of the Farne Islands, which group lies off the coast of Northumberland. The action of the book does not endure beyond the three days necessary for the weather to become calm, a relief expedition to be organised, and for the writer to accomplish 100,000 words; but these hundred thousand words represent the most remarkable book—with the possible exception of *A High Wind in Jamaica*, and any of several works by David Garnett—ever written about children in the English language.

Dormant read these three books in the somnifuge course of three nights. One of the singular advantages of extreme youth is that, when the youthful mind becomes porous to their educative power not only do the great classics of the world await perusal, but it will also be found that several modern writers whom one's elders have been obliged to read, volume by volume, often at considerable intervals of time, have half their life work waiting on the library shelf. Their first novel is picked up tentatively, perhaps because of a review, more probably because a relative has spoken of it scornfully. The second is seized more eagerly. Within a week ten books, the entire production of fifteen years of one man's endeavour, have been read, to the exclusion

of all other printed matter, and all other interests.

We do not breed popular philosophers in England: the climate, misty and brumish, and our educational system, are a counter to clarity of thought. The young man of Dormant's generation did not, in general, know sufficient French to read Gide and Alain Fournier and Malraux in the original, and were seldom able to judge those writers at their true worth when they did read them, in translation. The young men of the present day, although their ignorance of European languages other than their own is even greater, are more fortunate in one respect. The work of such excellent writers as Sartre and Moravia contain many exact and curious descriptions of scenes of sensual debauchery and are therefore readily made available to the British and American publics . . . for English publishers know well that the only foreigners who have any prospect of success in their island are the monumentally dull and the supposedly lewd.

All young men require a hero. This hero may be the monarch of bat or ball, a selected figure from antiquity, or merely a voice which seems to speak without equivocation from between the lines of print. Furthermore, as young men grow older, reach maturity, they tend to remain loyal to their heroes, with whom they have in some measure, identified themselves.

Dormant discovered Maurice Welsh at about the same time as he began to read the Russians; to one of whom, Turgenev, Welsh bore a certain stylistic and temperamental resemblance. When one's enthusiasms are shared by many other people the only way to make them more privately one's own, the boy discovered, is to outrun one's neighbour, yet even Dormant, blinded by his adulation, could not entirely fail to observe, as the years went by, that something was happening to his idol.

Welsh had always been a sociable man, much in drawing-room demand by reason of his personal talents and power to amuse. He was also extremely handsome; so handsome indeed that the unkind people, already mentioned, declared that *'he was too good looking to be a good writer.'*

There is no conclusive proof that worldly distractions corrupt, inevitably, a writer; yet it cannot be denied that such activities have indeed debased the talents of many, and that those who seem to withstand their temptations most successfully are persons such as Thackeray who were born corrupt.

Similarly, while it may just conceivably be ethical for novelists to review the work of other novelists, the effects of their so doing are often deplorable in so far as their own work is concerned: for how can a man, even of the strongest character, self-condemned to read half a dozen works of fiction every week, remain entirely unaffected by them and into what lumber-room of bric-à-brac is he not converting at least some part of his mind?

By the time that Dormant had become a man, Welsh's book-reviews were a standard feature of two weekly, and of one Sunday newspaper, and as is often the quaint circumstance in Great Britain the name of the reviewer, and anything complimentary which he may have said about a given work would be featured more prominently in the publisher's advertisements than that of the man who had actually written the book . . . *'Quite one of the most remarkable novels I have read for a long time—MAURICE WILSH.'* This, so Glenn had once informed Dormant, was known as 'keeping one's name before the public', apparently upon somewhat the same principle that manufacturers of meat extract hire hoardings in Piccadilly to advertise their wares.

By the year 1938, Maurice Welsh was an established writer. He had written the customary articles about Hitler

and Stalin, was heard regularly—sometimes as himself, sometimes in Northumbrian character parts—on the broadcasting system, and had even become associated with a commercial enterprise which, for an initial payment of thirty shillings, offered, to inculcate the minds of its subscribers with a sure appreciation of the World's great literature.

And if the fetid breath of scandal did once, at least, touch Welsh, it did so unknown to the British public, and to Dormant. The occasion was noteworthy. Together with certain of his contemporaries Welsh was summoned to a B.B.C. studio and there required, as were his colleagues, to answer a number of questions of the tedious category known to schoolboys as 'General Knowledge'. All might have passed off exceeding well, and Welsh have been acknowledged as the most brilliant of a brilliant team, had not a rival, piqued by his own failure to name the birthplace of Xenophon, and therefore grown suspicious, so harassed the Master of Ceremonies that the wretched man eventually broke down in the Café Royal and admitted that, previous to the broadcast, he had made Welsh privy to the questions which he would be called upon to answer. It says much for the well-known and perhaps necessary tolerance of the great Corporation that Welsh, after a few months of enforced silence, was again employed by them: many soldiers in the Middle East having written to enquire why his reconstructions of the World of John Peel had been so abruptly discontinued.

Dormant, who spent more than four of the six years of war absent from England knew nothing of such portends. He learnt, of course, and with some surprise, that Welsh had written, during this period, two detective novels and a volume of short stories of which the amiable intention was, apparently, to exalt the courage and devotion to duty of

temporary naval officers, but his remoteness from London, and the lack of demand in Cairo for works other than those of Mr. James Hadley Chase, effectively prevented him from obtaining the books of one who had remained, throughout the itch and cure of many desert sores, his ideal of what a writer should be.

Thus it was inevitable, when Dormant himself did write a book, that, in his utter ignorance of the world of letters, he should address his manuscript to the man who, among those, a generation older than himself, he most particularly esteemed.

The persons whom most writers dread above all is not that critic who has proved himself their implacable enemy: it is not this antagonist at all, but another, who, all unsuspecting of his rôle, comes forward and tells the wincing scribbler how much he enjoyed a certain book of theirs—their first. They smile politely, they nod their heads, but, did the *trouble-fête* but know it, he has caused them anguish far greater than a modern Sainte-Beuve, devoting himself uniquely to their ridicule, could possibly have inflicted.

Not even his best-intentioned friends could maintain that Dormant's first novel was his best. In the spring of 1944, while in the spiritual slough of a period, increasingly recurrent in his case, when thoughts of even miniature battlefronts inspired in him thoughts of terror, Dormant contrived to get himself attached to the Greek Brigade, then most pacifically undergoing training in sandy wastes not far from Alexandria. Dormant hoped, very naturally, that he had secured a comfortable billet. He was most grievously disappointed therefore when, to the hazards which the manifestations of the Hellenic temperament exposed him daily on the firing range, were presently added those, infinitely more perilous, of open rebellion.

None know, to this day, the exact motives which inspired

that memorable tumult, though it is said that they were not unconnected with the internal politics of the country to which the unhappy rebels belonged. The British are always ill-at-ease, shufflers of their hob-nailed boots, in the repressive rôle, but they have never been able to abandon their ancient habit of interfering with the rights of speech of factions unlikely to win power in small nations.

Dormant, who witnessed this revolt, intimately from a platoon, and more panoramically, from a company angle, wrote his novel about it. There was no harm in his doing that. Novels have been written upon a much slighter knowledge of the facts which they pretend to expound, and Dormant did at least have this excuse—it provided, of course, the most powerful chapter of his book—that, at one moment the angry Greeks had threatened to throw him into a particularly nauseating cess-pit. Of course, in Dormant's manuscript, the threat was not only made but put into execution, for where lives the novelist who would deprive himself of such a heaven-sent opportunity to describe a scene of private humiliation and the olfactory sensations which accompany it?

Dormant's manuscript, enclosed within folds of oilskin and containing authentic grains of desert sand, was carried to Maurice Welsh by a brother officer, bound for home leave.

That Welsh liked the book is probable: that its arrival was opportune is certain. The public, or so the critics who formed their opinion maintained, were crying out for new writers, and in particular for novels by the rising generation of young warriors. In actual fact, of course, the public were then as always, absolutely indifferent to the fare provided for them, and, enduring the rigours of the war in their daily lives, hoped rather pathetically that they would not be obliged to read about them in fiction. Little did they know



that a host of young men were even then biting pencil-stubs, throwing away their malaria pills, their food, even ammunition, in order to provide additional space for paper in their haversacks . . . little did they realise what harrowing scenes of sexual deviation in the Far East, what reminiscences of Marshal Tito, of the Brigade of Guards and of Neapolitan whore-houses must within measurable time form their literary diet.

Welsh wrote Dormant a charming and enthusiastic letter. Could they meet? he asked, for though he would be delighted to revise and cut, and otherwise prepare the novel for presentation to a publisher, he did not want to undertake the work without the preliminary of a personal interview. Three months later, on Dormant's return to England, they did meet. The encounter was cordial. Whatever his personal defects, the results of inordinate ambition and of a sense of emotional insecurity, Welsh was a man entirely without envy, generous of heart, and of mind, altruistic.

Most first novels, in their original state, are long. Dormant's was even longer than most, and contained more superfluous female characters, more reflections inspired by the writer's schooldays, and more free advertisements for various brands of whisky than any which Welsh could recollect having read. Welsh excised as many of these stigmata as was possible without destroying the entire fabric of the book. He reduced, for example, from thirty-six pages to nine the account of the hero's impressions, and actions, while inspecting the Pyramids with a Lebanese lady. When he had finished his work the book was about half its original length, and considerably the better for the pruning; quite apart from the fact that at least five extraneous themes were saved for Dormant's future work, instead of being thrown in, higgledy-piggledy, here, and therefore wasted. Upon Dormant's consenting, Welsh now sent the book to

Glenn: 'Not my favourite publisher,' he said, 'but I think you'll find he is the man for you.'

*'The first thing a young writer must expect, and yet can least of all suffer is criticism,'* wrote Lord Byron to John Reynolds, a man of great talent, who subsequently died, drunk; an obscure clerk to a Court in the Isle of Wight. 'No man,' added Byron, very sensibly, and quoting Doctor Johnson, 'No man was ever written down except by himself. Mistake not every scratch for a mortal wound. To kick down obstacles is the first resolve of a young and fiery spirit, a pleasant thing enough at the time, but not so afterwards, for he who would make his way in the world must let the world believe that it was made for him, and accommodate himself to the minutest observance of its regulations . . .'

Dormant had never read these words, and if he knew of Johnson's maxim, had forgotten it. None can see entirely into another's heart and, because of this disability, men are always inclined to attribute base motives to their fellows, a monopoly of virtue to themselves. It is remarkable that, just so long as Welsh continued to support and to encourage him, just so long, too, did Dormant admire Welsh blindly. In that resplendent spring of his endeavour such items as the broadcasts in dialect, the frequent lecture tours, the innumerable small devices of puff and the careful display of erudite circumstance by which Welsh kept his name upon the nation's lips did not irritate Dormant at all: on the contrary, by his very acquiescence in such things he seemed to show that he realised that they were an essential part of the literary life.

But when, having read his second book—which was the one about the Cypriot elopement—Welsh declared it to be, although well written, a grave misdirection of the author's talents, then . . . ah, then, Dormant began to see Welsh as he really was and, not being a character to do things by halves, wrote to his benefactor a letter so ill-mannered, so

precise in the detail of each grudge expressed that the relations between the two men could only terminate in an immediate break.

Later, although Glenn assured him that he had been right, he had acted as would any man of feeling who found that another, beneath a guise of encouragement and patronage, was merely attempting, like some Jesuit, to direct and supervise his endeavours. Later, in the waking hours of night, Dormant could not escape the thought that he had behaved both boorishly, and with ingratitude.

After all, what harm did Welsh do to any man except himself? It was not even certain, as his enemies maintained, that his curious conduct was due to a desire for monetary gain. Welsh was a distinguished man of letters, who lived in London, and who was obliged to encounter, daily, numbers of his own and of associated professions. He both was, and wished to be, a man of his times. He served himself well, indeed, but he also served the general cause of literature, and if, owing to his manifold activities, his own work suffered then surely he deserved the pity rather than the censure of brutal young men who could not deny with any certainty that they might not, before long, follow the same well-trodden path.

The course in English literature which Welsh presided was, although very superficial, undoubtedly the best of its kind. Nor was that course, whatever else it might be, particularly conventional. Dormant, skipping through the printed sales-talk one day, had been surprised to see *Troilus and Cressida*, the least 'correct' of all Shakespeare's plays recommended as among the best. Who knew what numbers of young persons, who otherwise would have remained eternally ignorant of it, had read that play, thanks to Maurice Welsh?

By lending his name to that other course—the one

which offered to make every subscriber into a second Dr. Cronin—it was said that Welsh showed a peculiar heartlessness and lack of taste. Yet was this really so? How many unfortunate writers did Welsh, in fact, persuade to jump the counter, leave the plough, in the hope that they might earn a fortune with their pens? Probably very few. The literary calling is so peculiarly unrewarding that few will devote a lifetime to it, abandoning all other prospects, unless they positively must. Meanwhile, struggling far into the night to perfect their short stories, to complete their one-act plays, Welsh's pupils might reflect that, if their electricity bills were now more heavy than in former times, the money saved by their renunciation of the cinema would square accounts.

And even should success not come: there would still be compensations. It was significant both that Welsh's course was usually taken by bachelors, and that these bachelors, subsequently marrying, often attributed their success in courtship to the love-letters which they had learnt to write by following the best examples, as provided for them by the Master.

Welsh was as omnipresent as the Royal Family. All classes of society were affected by his activities. Professional writers of film-scripts lived in constant fear that Welsh—who possessed the ear of their employers—might once again be co-opted to help them 'improve' and polish their work, but what is the dissatisfaction of one small segment of the population when placed beside great benefits? If Welsh had bored radio millions with his Sunday-night readings from Meredith he had also done much to rescue writers as admirable as Hazlitt and de Quincey from the twilight into which public opinion had consigned them.

After the break, Dormant and Welsh ceased to correspond. The years passed, bringing to the older writer many new

honours, much wealth and an attenuation of his imaginative powers, progressive but implacable which seemed to ensure that presently, for want of other inspiration, he would write his memoirs; to the younger the years brought, if not wisdom in his dealings with his fellow-men, at least some degree of tolerance.

The great merchant, to his balance-sheet addressed, may quiet the clamour of shareholders with pleasant talk of ten per cent., He is, indeed, a public figure but his fortune is built up in private, by manœuvres, and by brilliant strokes of business of which few persons gain cognisance. The writer—should he choose to play his part in affairs outside his narrow sphere—has no such protection and can never act with anonymity. Unless he is of transcendent genius or of a saintly disposition, the writer who ventures into the broader highways of the world will be exposed to all the worst passions which breed in the human breast, and may well feel their corrosive bite himself. Envy, malice, bitter rivalry, the transformation of purely academical quarrels into enduring personal enmity: all these will be his portion, and he will be a strong man if he rises superior to them, and a weak one if he does not dare to face their challenge.

Such were Dormant's thoughts as he walked beside Maurice Welsh on that November afternoon. To the whores waiting for custom on the street corners behind Bond Street, to the matrons, arm-in-arm, bound upon shopping expeditions, they must have seemed two somewhat ill-assorted but interesting men deep in the conversation of friends who had not met for years.

But in the secret of their heads, their thoughts were, toward each other, vinegarish and inimical.

"Miss Gurney . . . ?"

"Yes, Mr. Welsh?"

"Have you set next week's problem for the elementary course?"

"Yes, Mr. Welsh."

"Is it ready to go out?"

"It is, Mr. Welsh."

"Then tell Mabel to put it in the post tonight, and bring me in the answers to the last advertisement."

Maurice Welsh flicked down the indicator. The contraption was silent. He looked at Dormant.

"You don't approve of all this, do you?" he said.

"Not very much," said Dormant.

"I suppose you think that I am a fraud."

"I don't know," said Dormant. "I suppose it depends whether you think yourself a fraud."

"I wasn't born a Barnum, you know," said Welsh. "It was only later that I discovered that the man whose heart is fastened to his sleeve succeeds best when he puts on grease-paint and lets the public take him for a clown."

Dormant said nothing.

"If the clown makes, now and then," said Welsh, "one good joke, which plucks at the heart-strings of the audience, even while they laugh, then the clown is worth while, isn't he?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Dormant coldly. "Have you made a good joke recently?"

"I made one as soon as we came in," said Welsh. "Do you know what this week's problem for my pupils is?"

"No," said Dormant, instantly alert.

"I asked them to write," said Welsh, "to write a supposed obituary of a certain well-known novelist in the style of *The Times* newspaper. On Saturday morning I shall have over a thousand such obituaries, and it will be surprising if there is not a witty line in one of them."

"Which you retail round the town, I suppose?"

"Exactly," said Welsh.

A woman entered the room and laid a pile of letters on the desk. She did not speak. Neither did Welsh speak, but when the woman had gone away, he looked up, across the first letter, at Dormant:

"It is all very well to rant and rage," he said. "One can do that, of course . . . one can cut one's throat, too, but is it really worth your literary while?"

Dormant made no reply.

"I say 'literary'," continued Welsh, "because the God in whom I have the misfortune to believe gave to certain persons the ability to express themselves, pen in hand, on paper."

"Go on," said Dormant.

"I most certainly intend to go on. We are all scribblers. Among ourselves we squabble, and certain of our squabbles we take great care to render public . . ."

"You mean that you do?" said Dormant.

"Dormant . . ." said Welsh.

"Yes, Mr. Welsh." The spoken words lacked colour. So might a hostile witness have delivered them at the Old Bailey.

"If, quite suddenly, you lost your ability to write, what would you do?"

"I should become a deck-hand on a caique which is based on the island of Amorgos. I made sure of that some time ago."

"You have all your answers pat, haven't you, Dormant? You remind me of those soldiers who, unlikely to be needed in the front line, were told to keep their powder dry."

"Which front line was that—Torres Vedras?" said Dormant. "You know perfectly well that I don't remind you of any such thing. You know very well, too, to what extent I venerated you at one time . . ."

"You think I have betrayed you, then?" said Welsh, acidly.

"I know bloody well that you have." He paused. "Well, well," he added cheerfully. "I never knew I irritated you so much." He looked at Welsh and became suddenly conscious that here, after all, was a man possessed of a rare and wonderful power of feeling; a man who, whatever armistice he might have begged of Life could, when he chose, see into the unknown country of men's souls and walk in dark places without a nostalgia for death.

So: "You didn't bring me here to quarrel, did you?" he said, gently.

"Yes, I did," replied Welsh, and he grinned. "I thought if we had a good fight to begin with, then we could be friends again." He leant forward, across the pile of letters. When he leant forward like that, Welsh looked, in spite of his frail physique, rather like some old soldier, grown with time a little innocent. His melancholy eyes seemed to stare, less at Dormant, than at the ridicule of Life itself. Perhaps because of this man's very frailty, Dormant had often thought that Welsh resembled a cripple, those fortunate unfortunates who, struck once and irrevocably by fate, are afterwards at peace, passive and amused spectators of the slow advance of corruption in others. The people who said, mockingly, that Welsh looked far too much like a writer to be a good one, were not, perhaps, in spite of their malice, so very far from the truth. Here was a man in whom the heart desired to dominate, and yet could neither satisfy its thirst for power nor its desire for love. It was surely no accident that when Welsh wrote best, he wrote about children. His own childhood had been so splendid an age, so heavy with imagination and with intimations of a future paradise that manhood must have seemed to him a meagre and unjust reward by comparison; a toy for which he had not asked, and with which he played, a little petulantly, because he was polite and did not wish to give offence.



Intuition lay strong in Welsh. It is probable that he knew what Dormant was thinking: , "Don't let's quarrel any more," he said. "I know you see yourself in the interesting character of the lone wolf, Dormant, but I don't think you're the man to reject a helping hand, are you?"

"No, perhaps not," admitted Dormant.

"You see these letters on my desk?"

"I do."

"For some time now I've been looking out for a collaborator, 'Dormant . . . a collaborator in a rather special kind of work."

"Really?" said Dormant. He wondered if Welsh had contracted to write the life of some defunct politician: he had often read, in the weekly papers, letters expressive of a similar resolve: *'I have undertaken the biography of . . . I would be grateful if persons in possession of documents, letters concerning him would forward them to me, upon loan.'* How fortunate King Alfred, inasmuch as, although the woman distinctly saw him burn the cakes, she could not propagate this vital information beyond her limited and village circle.

"These letters, and, as you can see, these are more than two hundred of them," continued Welsh, "are in reply to an advertisement."

"Yes," said Dormant, attentive.

"I know a man," said Welsh, "who takes all his plots from the more scabrous Sunday newspapers. I know another man who sits hours every week in police courts, and still another who spends all his royalties taking *débutantes* out to lunch in the Proustian belief that the secret of life can be ascertained from virgins of the recent aristocracy."

"Yes?" said Dormant.

"I mention this," said Welsh, "merely to illustrate the fact that we all have our different methods. We give first what we have, inside ourselves, to give. That done, we give what

we have learnt from life. Some of us, by the happy marriage of imagination and experience are able to continue on that second path throughout our entire careers and if, sometimes, we repeat ourselves, then our technical ability helps us to keep the public unaware of it."

"Yes?" said Dormant.

"Few of us," said Welsh, "accept willingly the rôle of simple entertainers. We may be only conjurors with a set of coloured billiard balls but we don't enjoy it when people tell us so. We may have only five or six important things to say and one style in which to say them, but we all hope to give what is best in ourselves."

"But these are admirable sentiments," said Dormant. "Are they extracted from your course of literature?"

"Don't laugh, Dormant. This is more a weeping matter."

"What you are really saying, isn't it," said Dormant, "is that many are called but few are chosen—but surely that is not a phenomenon peculiar to our own profession?"

"No," said Welsh, "but it is one of its worst drawbacks. A writer should be many men but he can, in fact, be only one. It is true that, like the octopus, he has many tentacles, and the rock to which they may chance to clasp becomes almost—but never quite—a part of himself. An actor comes on the stage and declares to you that he is Hamlet. Later, when you leave the theatre, you may think that he was a very bad Hamlet, but while the performance lasts, you are obliged to believe him. That is not so with us."

Dormant was silent. In general he found these discussions of professional problems boring, but something in Welsh's manner impressed him now. Dormant would have been most glad to have possessed the genius of a Dostoevsky, but there were, after all, compensations for its lack: he would never produce an Alyosha, but at the same time he

would probably pay his gambling debts and entertain rational views upon questions political. He might not possess the wide and panoramic vision of a Dickens, but, he was unlikely to create anything quite as awful as Little Nell. From both the glory and the excess of genius he would ever stand protected.

But Welsh was once more talking: "Three times every week," he said, "I have to go through Trafalgar Square. I never do so without a sinking feeling in my heart, and d'you know why——?"

"Because you think it's time they cleaned the outside of the National Gallery?" suggested Dormant.

"Don't be facetious. No—because, every time I go there, I look up at Nelson, on his pillar, and I think that is what we novelists should be, and so seldom are."

"Are you suggesting that Nelson's image has some peculiar intuitive faculty?"

"No, but I believe that there isn't one among us who would not envy that man his position. Several hundred feet above the ground he stands and below him swarms the endless crowd. Wouldn't you like to be up there, Dormant, far above the *mêlée* and the malice of your daily life?"

"They'd have to enlarge the platform," said Dormant. "I'd want Lady Hamilton to keep me company."

Welsh opened his desk. He took a small piece of paper from a drawer, and handed it to Dormant.

"Read that," he said.

Dormant read. This is what he read:

*'Ghost writer. Your uncompleted memoirs . . . that unfinished novel? There is perhaps a wide public for the manuscript which you have been holding so long in a drawer. Let a well-known novelist aid you to redraft, and rewrite it. Absolute confidence ensured. Write Box number 1991.'*

Dormant laid down the slip of paper. "Are there really so

many unpublished authors?" said Dormant. The prospect appalled him.

"You'd be surprised," said Welsh.

"But who the devil are they all?"

Welsh married his two teams of knobbly and hairless fingers. Small bones within his knuckles crackled. "Generals tend to write their memoirs," he said, "but Admirals, with the example of Marryat before them, write novels. Retired Civil Servants favour the essay and the short story: I have in my files nearly a hundred short stories dealing with the horrible consequences which may result, indirectly, from a non-delivery of their hourly cup of tea."

"You must know many secrets," said Dormant.

"No," said Welsh, "for the blind spot of the amateur is anger. He is inevitably inclined to debase himself by attacks which he makes upon his betters."

"Perhaps they were not really his betters?" suggested Dormant.

"Yes," said Welsh. "We should all like to think that, but I'm afraid it isn't true. The amateur picks up his pen only when each drop of ink seems worth its weight in vitriol to him. Napoleon wrote comparatively little, himself, but hundreds since, from the old Whig, Trevelyan, to his own valet, Constant, have written *about* him." Welsh paused. Once again his fingers crackled. "I suppose you wonder why I do all this?" he said, and the wave of his hand seemed to indicate, not merely the pile of letters, but the entire premises.

"I presume you do it for money," replied Dormant with insolence.

"Then you are quite wrong," said Welsh. He stared at Dormant mournfully.

"Do you know what first attracted me in you?" he said.

"No?"

"Your extreme facility, Dormant: it is so like my own." He paused. "I daresay you remember the wicked fairy who, finding that she couldn't undo what had been done, mixed a curse with every blessing?"

"Well, what about her?"

"By the time a writer is fairly launched on his career," said Welsh, "he can hardly help knowing certain things about himself. There is also a dark and terrible question looking out at him from every blank sheet of paper . . . *why is he writing at all?*"

"Yes," said Dormant. "I know that question well enough."

"Some people," said Welsh, "some people, and among the greatest, resolve the problem quite easily, not only to their own satisfaction, but also to that of the public. They become entertainers. Their work diverts, stimulates. The world contains a million stories. They decide which kind of story suits them. Then they write it."

"And what is wrong with that?"

"Nothing. The destiny of such men is fortunate. They always remind me of bakers walking into their shop with a whole tray of new loaves, crisp and brown and succulent; something for every man to get his teeth into . . ."

"And, let us hope, digest?" said Dormant. He produced a piece of paper and a pencil. "D'you mind if I make a note of some of these metaphors?" he said. "I can never think of good ones myself."

But Welsh was not listening to Dormant. He had recently been reading an article by a fashionable Jesuit, he said. This man had compared the situation of the student of theology, confronted by the problem of the infinite, to that of a beggar gathering crumbs of truth, trying to reassemble a loaf of bread from discarded fragments. Certain writers were in a similar situation.

"Now he's going to mix it," thought Dormant. He had listened with admiration, but he did not believe that Welsh could remain indefinitely in bakery: the crash must come.

It came. After a closing reference to unleavened bread, the sense of which Dormant did not entirely catch, Welsh changed profession. He was now seen in the interesting character of an æsthetic surgeon. Certain writers, he declared, of whom he was one and Dormant another, could only produce books which were composed, as it were, of strips of their living flesh. Such writers fell . . .

"Between two stools?" suggested Dormant.

Yes, agreed Welsh, that was correct, and the remedy—the ~~only~~ remedy—was self-discipline. Dormant (again, the hand waved) might think that many of these present activities were futile, but Welsh could not agree with this opinion. In helping others, one helped oneself; in participating, as fully as possible in the national life of one's country, one became better fitted to present aspects of it between the covers of a book. He had a proposition to make to Dormant . . .

"Good God, you surely don't want me to help you teach the Admirals grammar, do you? I've enough trouble trying to teach myself."

"And why not?" asked Welsh, blandly.

"But haven't you any other collaborators?"

"Yes, several, but I can always do with a new one." Welsh patted his pile of letters. "Listen," he said. "You can't go on writing about amorous imbroglios in Greece all your life."

"No. That's what Glenn has been telling me."

"And he's perfectly right. Look here. I wouldn't mind betting you're stuck for a subject now, aren't you? Well, why not try something different . . . let yourself lie fallow for a while."

"I daresay you're quite justified in referring to me as if I were a field," said Dormant, "but you seem to forget I have to produce an annual harvest."

"Here's your harvest," said Welsh. He divided the letters on his desk into two piles of equal size. Rising, he laid one pile in front of Dormant. "I haven't even looked at them," he said. "Choose any one you like, and send the others back to me."

## Six

"You really can't cry here, you know. Come up to my room." Dormant did not wish to speak unkindly. He rather enjoyed a good bout of tears himself when things went really wrong, but not in public. Certainly not here in the lounge of the *Fragonard* with so many infirm old ladies staring at them from behind cups of tea.

Mr. Mendoza stood up. He snuffled, then he blew his nose. He clasped the brief-case tightly to his chest as if the contact of this article, associated as it was in his mind with the superior forms of business activity, afforded him a necessary solace.

The lift operator, a Pole, greeted Dormant with warmth, but upon Mr. Mendoza he bent a stare of suspicion. When the lift was passing the second floor he said something to him in a low voice, and in a language which Dormant did not understand. Mr. Mendoza made no reply, but his face grew pale.

"What did he say?" enquired Dormant when they were in the corridor and approaching his room.

"He spoke in Yiddish," replied Mr. Mendoza. "He asked me if I had any collar studs to sell him. Those Poles hate us so much that they know instinctively when our luck is out."

"But how did he learn Yiddish?"

"Just like you English learn a few dirty words in French: they come in useful." Mr. Mendoza raised his tear-stained face. "He was probably obliged to pawn a suit in Warsaw once," he said, and then he added with a bitter humour: "How would you like to belong to a race which had to pay for every suit and every wedding ring which every damned fool ever had to sell?"

This seemed to Dormant an over-simplification of an ancient racial problem, but since he did not wish Mr. Mendoza to break down again in the corridor, he contented himself with some sympathetic wagging of his head.

"This is a nice room," said Mr. Mendoza when Dormant had ensconced him in an arm-chair. Dormant noticed that the man's eyes were brimming with tears and so, wishing to behave tactfully, he walked over to the window and looked out, first at Battersea Power Station, ambushed by cloud; and then down at the flat roof of the ballroom, in which an orchestra was playing tangoes for a *thé-dansant*.

"Mr. Dormant," said Mr. Mendoza. "I would like to ask you for a favour."

"Certainly," Dormant spoke with heartiness. He had already decided that a single large loan being in every way preferable to numerous smaller ones, he would advance Mr. Mendoza twenty-five pounds.

"Mr. Dormant, with your permission, I should greatly enjoy a bath."

"Eh?"

"My sister and brother-in-law, with whom I live, Mr. Dormant, do not like me to see their bathroom more than is absolutely necessary. It is one of the many ways in which they show me that my presence is intolerable."

"I'll turn on the water for you."

"Thank you," said Mr. Mendoza with dignity. He



removed his coat and his tie and laid them ceremoniously upon the spare bed. He followed Dormant into the bathroom.

"If you have no objection to seeing me naked," he said, "I should very much like to discuss my affairs with you while actually lying in the bath. Warm water soothes me. Already, at the thought of it, I feel more calm."

"Just as you please." Dormant leant against the wash-basin waiting for Mr. Mendoza to undress. The latter, however, seemed suddenly embarrassed.

"I must ask you to leave me alone for one moment, Mr. Dormant."

"Very well." Dormant returned to the bedroom. He looked down once more at the roof of the ballroom. On the flat surface glistening with soot and with recent rain, two cats faced each other with backs arched, claws raised, disputing possession of what was, to them, no doubt, desirable territory.

"Come in now, please, Mr. Dormant."

Dormant entered the bathroom. Mr. Mendoza lay supine in the bath, caressing his thighs. He was extremely hairy but considerably less fat, naked, than he appeared when fully dressed. Indeed, the remains of a once puissant musculature could be clearly perceived upon his diaphragm, rising through the blubber, inevitable in a man of his age, like the walls of a neglected desert redoubt through too pervasive sands.

"I hope I was not rude," he said. "I asked you to get out for a moment because I wear a abdominal aid. It is lying over there on the chair. I don't mind you seeing it but I would not have liked you to watch me take it off." In the bath above, beyond, and far distant in blockade of Mr. Mendoza, Dormant was grateful to see his collection of celluloid farm animals; the duck, the two swans, the seven cygnets. Mr.

Mendoza chivvied these creatures gently now, and watched them sail away in line abreast in the current caused by his raised knee.

"They are not provided by the hotel, of course?" he said. "You take them with you everywhere?"

"They help me to think," replied Dormant uncomfortably. He sat down, arranging his chair in such a way that he would see no more of Mr. Mendoza than his reclining head.

"Mr. Mendoza," he said. "Don't think I doubt what you say but what I don't understand is this: why *won't* the Ministry of Labour give you a permit to work in this country?"

"Because I am an extremely undesirable foreigner who is too old to hew coal and who does not know how to make aeroplane engines." Mr. Mendoza soaped the black forest on his chest.

"I see. And this other business—the books, the trips to the Continent—is that all finished, too?"

"Unfortunately—yes," replied Mr. Mendoza. "I had a little trouble in Ireland." He had been telling the truth when he declared that a hot bath would calm his nerves. His hand no longer trembled, his eyes were dry, he spoke dispassionately about himself.

"It is never easy to be a Jew," he said, "but to be an old and penniless Jew is horrible. People expect us to succeed, you know."

"But you *did* succeed at one time, Mr. Mendoza."

"Maybe—but I forgot to put my money in the bank. Now I have a cabin trunk and eight suits, and fourpence in my pocket—and only my self-esteem to make it feel a million."

One of the two celluloid swans was not entirely watertight. Usually when Dormant himself was in the bath, this swan would cruise proud and serene until such time as its

owner, heaving himself upright, began to sponge his chest and neck. Then the swan, bullied by the monstrous and reverberating waves, would founder slowly but with decorum, its painted beak held upright to the last.

Now, however, this same swan, which had hitherto been skylarking in the swell caused by the rise and fall of Mr. Mendoza's prominently nipples chest, sank suddenly for no apparent reason, unless it could be that the recumbent man had raised and scratched a foot. Mr. Mendoza retrieved the swan. He laid it, dripping rivulets of water ballast, on the edge of the bath. Dormant observed that the swan showed a gaping hole in its lower chest. Had Mr. Mendoza sat upon it inadvertently? He frowned.

"Mr. Mendoza," he said, "I'm not being offensive. I'm perfectly willing to lend you some money—indeed, I want to—but won't you tell me why you came to me rather than somebody else?"

"Yes, of course, I intend to do that," replied Mr. Mendoza. He seemed quite unperturbed by Dormant's bluntness. "But first let me explain to you something of my circumstances." Mr. Mendoza took a handful of bath salts from the jar. He scattered the crystals upon the murky waters. "Perhaps the first thing you should hear is my Christian name?" he continued. "It is very romantic. I am called Ferenc."

"Is that so?"

"I have somewhat the same family background as Kafka," said Mr. Mendoza. "Indeed, my own father knew Kafka's father quite well." He said this much as a man who had been born in Sheffield but who, personally, took no interest in cutlery, might mention the fact to a stranger known for his addiction to knives.

Dormant decided that under no circumstances would he now lend Mr. Mendoza more than fifteen pounds.

"You are wondering why I approach you rather than people whom I knew in happier days?" said Mr. Mendoza.

"Yes, the thought did occur to me."

"It is because I have already borrowed so much money from that kind of person, and now I can't borrow any more."

Dormant grinned: Mr. Mendoza might well be a rascal, but he must certainly receive the full twenty-five pounds, and more if he needed it. There was something most engaging in the way in which he made smooth his path towards the saving cheque. Dormant remembered something in this connection that Glenn had once said to him, speaking of writers in general: "*There isn't one among you who doesn't give himself away, who doesn't reveal to the studious reader his true character, however much he may attempt to hide it beneath the patter and the plots, and anthologies of other peoples' opinions.*" Glenn had appeared to regard that state of affairs as being in the nature of an intellectual insult to himself, but Dormant had never been able to consider it as particularly reprehensible. Why, naturally, a man's quirks, his beliefs and his failings—no doubt, above all, his failings—became more evident when one had read several of his books. Surely Glenn's vindictive cry of—"I've caught you out"—might with more propriety have been addressed to those members of the craft who abused their calling, who presented themselves to the public not as they were, nor even as they desired to be, but rather as the mood of a transient epoch seemed to mandate . . . rather as, at this moment, Mr. Mendoza, his initial storm of tears ended, seemed to be wishing that Dormant should regard him as an amiable, unprincipled, but nonetheless diverting rogue, well worthy of a loan.

This mood of complacency was immediately annihilated by a most extraordinary occurrence. Mr. Mendoza, who had so recently appeared entirely at his ease, now began to

weep again. Great tears emerged from the man's eyes, trickled down his chest, and from the last extremity of rose-coloured schops, dropped soundlessly into the bath.

"Mr. Mendoza . . ."

"Listen, boy: I tried to put up a good show. I swear I did. The kind of show you'd like . . ."

"Mr. Mendoza . . . don't be silly. Look here . . . take this towel. I'm your friend: I really am. Listen—I don't give a damn about money. I like to have it . . . that's all . . . just the same as you, I daresay. The other day I received quite a lot which I don't deserve. Listen, Mr. Mendoza, would you like fifty pounds . . . would you like a hundred?"

"Call me Ferenc, then."

"No, I won't. I don't like the name."

Mr. Mendoza sat up in the bath: "Maybe if I told you stories like I said once, that would be a kind of payment?"

"I don't want any payment."

Mr. Mendoza sighed: "I knew you were a good man the moment I set eyes on you."

"But I'm not a good man: I'm a very bad man."

"No . . . in the way I mean, you are good. You do not say to yourself: '*This Mendoza, perhaps he is taking me for a sucker.*' You do not think along those lines at all."

"No—why should I?"

"My relatives in Hampstead, they think like that. Their name is Goldberg. '*Don't wear rings, Ferenc,*' my sister says, '*they make you look so foreign.*' That was before I pawned them."

"Did you pawn your cigarette-case, too?"

"That's a thing I'll never do as long as I live."

"Why not?"

"Because it's the only souvenir I've got left from the time when I was a sucker myself."

"I'm afraid you're a very complicated character, Mr. Mendoza."

"Not more than you."

"Maybe you're right."

"No maybe about it. Why do you think I came to you; a guy I only saw once in my life?"

"I think you've got an idea that writers are particularly sympathetic to other people's misfortunes."

Mr. Mendoza shook his head.

"Well, why then?" said Dormant.

"Because you're like me. It doesn't make sense to you."

"What doesn't?"

"All of it. Everything. Life, and the nights."

"Sometimes I'm afraid it makes altogether too much sense, Mr. Mendoza."

"Not like it does to my sister. The other day she told me she's going to change her name to Mackenzie. It costs twenty pounds."

"Well, that certainly proves she believes in something. Why don't you go one better and call yourself O'Brien."

"You mustn't laugh at me, Mr. Dormant. I am very serious."

"That's just it. I don't believe you'd notice these little things, Mr. Mendoza, if you were still a rich man."

"It's because I began to notice them that I've become a poor man," replied Mr. Mendoza.

A little later while his guest was dressing, Dormant sat down at the card-table in the bedroom. He took out his cheque-book and, with it, the various papers which he had received from the solicitor, Mr. Rivers. As he signed the cheque, Dormant looked down at the roof. The cats continued to face one another, their position unchanged.

"Six hundred pounds is a lot of money," said Mr.

Mendoza, when handed the cheque. He did not, however, seem unduly surprised.

"Not for what you're going to do with it, it isn't."

"Are you hiring me, Mr. Dormant?"

"No, I just want you to do a few things I can't be bothered to do myself." He handed Mr. Mendoza the sheet of paper in his father's neat handwriting. "It is a racing system," he explained. "I can't make head or tail of it myself, but the principle is something to do with four-year-old horses. I notice that you have to start with a capital of five hundred pounds."

"What is the other hundred for, then?"

"Expenses."

"You are more than generous, Mr. Dormant."

"Am I?"

"I am saying what is usual in these circumstances, Mr. Dormant. It is customary to thank one's benefactor."

"I am not your benefactor. If you wish to thank somebody you should thank my father."

"May I ask if your father made money with this system?" enquired Mr. Mendoza.

"Yes—not much perhaps, but a little. You will find all the relevant figures written down there. Also my address in case you wish to get in touch with me."

Mr. Mendoza picked up his tie from the bed. He knotted it carefully: "Mr. Dormant," he said, "there is something I wish to ask you, something which I sense."

"Yes?"

"Why do you behave as if this money did not belong to you?"

"I don't think we need go into that."

"Would you not be happier if you told me?"

"I doubt it."

The two men exchanged a glance in the dressing-table

mirror. Then Mr. Mendoza returned to the bed. He put on his coat. "I suppose you know that you are saving my life," he said.

"I would much rather save your self-esteem."

"I shall never get that back, Mr. Dormant, because I shall never again be able to believe the things which helped it to live and breathe."

"Is that why you feel that there is some strange affinity between us?" said Dormant. He looked out of the window. The two cats continued to face each other but one of them—and the larger of the pair—was now retreating cautiously, its eyes still fixed upon its enemy.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Mendoza. He smiled. The smile caused his strange-pointed ears to rise, so that Dormant felt impelled to smile, too.

He took another batch of papers from the drawer. "By the way," he said, "would it also amuse you to investigate something else?" He passed the papers to Mr. Mendoza who studied them.

"But this is a list of stockholdings," he said.

"Exactly. If you look at it closely you will see that it includes four gold mines in British Guiana. My solicitor tells me that everything there is quite worthless, but if you'd like to check up, you're very welcome to do so."

"I should like nothing better," said Mr. Mendoza.

"Then I'll send a letter advising my solicitor. He will be surprised to see you . . . very surprised, I daresay."

There was a silence for some moments. Finally, Mr. Mendoza sat down beside Dormant. He touched his arm:

"Mr. Dormant."

"Yes?"

"Did your father do you some very great harm?"

"No. Quite the contrary."



"Well, then, you may think it stupid of me, Mr. Dormant, but I am your friend . . . your sincere friend . . . and I do not wish to undertake these things for you unless you will tell me the truth."

"I killed my mother," said Dormant.

"Mr. Dormant, I feel quite sure you did nothing of the kind."

"Very well, let me put it this way: I was responsible for her death."

"Explain to me, please, Mr. Dormant."

"I assure you it would change nothing if I talked for half an hour on the subject."

"Maybe not for you, but for me it might change many things."

"All right. Just as you please. I was twelve. She was thirty-four. It was a Saturday. She had been ill for months, and it was getting worse. There was a nurse. The time was just after midday when most people are preparing to eat lunch. My father was expected home any moment: that was my excuse. The nurse had to go out to chemists to buy cotton-wool. My mother was sleeping. There was no reason to fear anything, but the nurse told me to sit in the room until she came back. I sat in the room for ten minutes, but I had always hated the smell there so I went down into the garden and played. While I was playing, my mother woke up. I told you she was very weak. The nurse always helped her when she wished to go to the bathroom. Since the nurse wasn't there my mother attempted to get up by herself. She fell against the electric fire. It was not a bad burn, only on her arm, and her arm fell free, but within a week she was dead."

"So, all this time . . ." said Mr. Mendoza.

"Yes," said Dormant. "All this time. Damn it, what d'you expect. I didn't much care for my mother. I rather

disliked her, if you must know, but I was born head-over-heels in love with my father . . . and he was so damned affectionate afterwards."

"Do you know what I think?" said Mr. Mendoza.

"No?"

"I think that Pole in the lift must have unusual powers of insight."

"Why?"

Mr. Mendoza fetched his brief-case. He laid it upon Dormant's knee and he opened it. The rows of collar-studs, front and back, gleamed falsely against the great expanse of white cardboard.

That evening, his last in London, Dormant visited the theatre with friends—for he did possess several friends, but unfortunately they do not form a part of this story—and after eating supper in a Chinese restaurant in Shaftesbury Avenue, he retired to bed even as the orchestra in the ballroom downstairs began to play '*Auld Lang Syne*'.

Next morning he rose early, paid his bill, and transported his baggage by taxi to Marylebone Station, where he deposited it in the cloakroom. This done, he purchased a large envelope, and within it he placed all the letters, save one, with which Maurice Welsh had entrusted him. He bought stamps and put this envelope in the post.

More than ninety minutes remaining before the departure of his train, Dormant decided to pay a visit of adieu to Glenn, whom he had already acquainted by telephone with the course and change of his plans. He found the offices of his publishers, although apparently open to the public, entirely deserted of staff. The hour, it was true, was barely ten o'clock.

After playing for some minutes with the telephone switchboard—he found, for example, that by changing the

positions of the various plugs one could cause a quite extraordinary number of bells to ring—Dormant became attracted by certain neat packages lying on a table. He opened several of these and found that they contained signed copies of novels by certain of his contemporaries. Dormant selected some light reading for the dull hours which must surely lie ahead and, tucking the parcel under his arm, entered the waiting-room where he discovered a charwoman engaged in cleaning the carpet with a Hoover.

“Good mornin’, sir. Up bright and early, you are. Can you ’ear a fire alarm ringing somewhere?”

“It’s probably just an ambulance,” said Dormant. Having caused it to speak he had been unable to silence the telephone switchboard.

“Like a cup of tea, sir?” The woman pointed to the kettle brewing on an upturned gas-fire.

“No, thank you.”

At half-past ten the clatter of high-heeled shoes and the curses of women complaining about ladders in their stockings announced the arrival of the secretaries. At a quarter to eleven a more measured tread suggested that greater dignitaries were imminent.

Dormant poked his head round the door. Glenn was mounting the stairs.

“I say, what time does your slave market open, anyway?”

“We work a twenty-five-hour week like everyone else. Don’t pretend you’ve been sent by the Union, Dormant.”

“I came to say good-bye.”

“Well, don’t stand there. Come upstairs. You forgot something last time.” In his office, Glenn handed Dormant the bottle of whisky. “When are you off?”

“In about half an hour. As you see, I’m following your advice and sampling the joys of rural England.”

“It’s the first time I ever heard the borders of

Buckinghamshire described in that way," said Glenn. A new thought occurred to him. "What about that novel? Don't forget you've only till April."

"I'm working day and night on it."

"Why?" said Glenn suspiciously. "Not drugging or something now, are you?" His face grew red. "Why doesn't somebody stop those bloody bells?" he shouted.

"It's just the heady, champagne atmosphere of London," said Dormant.

"*Hum!*" Glenn gazed with distaste at a manuscript lying open on his desk. "*My Gaard*," he said absently, then: "You'd better watch your step with this woman you're going to. I'm told she's absolute poison."

"I will," said Dormant.

A secretary entered. She whispered something to her employer.

"Give them back, Adrian," said Glenn.

Dormant undid his package. He laid the books on the desk. "Let me keep Knight," he pleaded. "He's got such a nice, twiggly signature."

"Get out of my sight," said Glenn. "Go back to Greece." Then, with a roar which shook the very windows. "If somebody doesn't stop those —ing bells I'll go *ma-aa-ad . . .*"

*'Prosperous people must live on this line,'* thought Dormant deferentially as he surveyed the three copies of the *Financial Times* lying on the cushions of the railway carriage. While waiting for his train he had been able to inspect more fully Marylebone Station—of which he could not recollect having heard mention before—and he had been bewitched by the rough Cockney courtesy of its porters, and the true and Cingalese, almost Diego Garcian, strength of the cup of tea served to him, together with a floating and circuitous fly in

the buffet. In such a place, felt Dormant, one could actually believe the stories told of Victorian ministers such as that concerning the luckless Mr. Huskisson, who so frequently fell to their death beneath trains.

Dormant was alone in the carriage. Always anxious to better himself intellectually, he picked up one of the copies of the *Financial Times* and began to read: '*British Government Securities,*' he read, '*continue to creep up slowly as the result of a steady investment demand. By the end of the day nearly all the undated, long and medium dated issues had risen one-sixteenth of a point . . .*'

Dormant was much impressed by these words, for were they not indications of another, a more precise world, a sphere unknown to him, beyond his simple comprehension? In his abysmal ignorance, Dormant had always considered it to be of great advantage to the gentlemen whose names he now read in company reports that the system of Marxian communism should have been first adopted by a nation as inefficient and as primitive as were the Muscovites.

Yet, even as he began to count the number of retired Generals of whom mention was made as members of directorates, Dormant endured the tug of duty: less than fifty minutes remained before he would reach his destination. It was imperative that he should arrive with a mind well ordered. He took out from his breast-pocket, unpleated, and read for the thirtieth time, the vital letter.

Eddystone House,  
Nyecombe.

3rd December:

Dear Mr. Dormant,

*I gladly confirm, in writing, the arrangements which we have made by telephone and telegram. You are to come here, at your convenience, for a probationary period of two months during which you will be my guest. Since you will also be, in the strict and*

*inoffensive sense of this word, my employee, I propose to pay you the token sum of seven pounds each week. It is understood between us that you will revise, prepare for publication and provide in a style compatible with the rest of the original in my possession, the eighty missing pages of the novel written by my husband's grandfather.*

*I take this opportunity of stating that when I originally replied to your advertisement in 'The Times' newspaper I expected to engage a more mature, and if I may say this without offence, a more celebrated man. In the interval provided by our negotiations, I have however occupied myself in a study of your various books, and I consider myself in duty bound to inform you that I like neither their style nor their moral tenor. You appear, however, to be a young man of some promise and, as a fellow writer, I shall make it my duty to indicate to you those smoother paths which are not less attractive and rewarding because they are well trodden. . . .*

*My Secretary, Caroline Vandeleur, will meet you at the station.*

*Yours very truly,  
Isabel Drawbridge.*

Having read it, Dormant replaced the letter in his pocket. He stood up. He examined his torso in the mirror between the pictures of Corfe Castle and Ann Hathaway's cottage, said how-do-you-do to himself twice in a grave voice, then made the series of remarks quoted below.

'But how delightful! Porridge is my favourite food. . . . Never give Cos lettuces to your bunnies, Lady Drawbridge . . . the subsequent acidity of their urine is said to corrode even teak. . . . Yes, I agree: it is a most peculiar name, and like that of Strongbow, it was acquired in a most peculiar manner. . . .'

'Do tell us how Mr. Dormant. Don't be shy.'

'I am not likely to be shy, Lady Drawbridge. No sooner did you communicate with me than I consulted Burke. How could I be shy in the presence of a collateral descendant

of a man who owes his title to the fact that Prinny owed him money. . . .

*'Mr. Dormant, don't be too hard upon us. You seem to forget that the third Earl was killed while endeavouring to save the body of the Prince Imperial on the Matabele battlefield.'*

'My views concerning the House of Lords are those held by the Brontë sisters and Mr. Charles Waterton, Madam.'

*'I'm sure you are quite right but won't you please tell us about the first Dormant, Mr. Dormant?'*

'Madam, I intend to do so. Picture to yourself a grey day such as we experience only in our English channel . . .'

*'But I always go abroad by air now, Mr. Dormant.'*

'William of Normandy, known afterwards as the "Conqueror", did not go by air, Madam. Ah no, indeed: in the prow, the very prow of the first barque he stood, Madam, gazing at the White Cliffs of Beachy Head. The waves, hitherto benign, became suddenly turbulent. Behind the Duke a stench arose, terrible, cloacal in its intensity. The horses? Madam, no quadruped was responsible. It was de Courcy, moaning with his head upon a thwart: it was de Lacy with his anguished mask thrust overboard above the thrashing waters. . . .'

*'Do go on, Mr. Dormant . . . how unwise of them to have eaten lunch at sea.'*

'There was panic, Madam, instant and infectious panic. The Normans, as we know, unlike their Breton neighbours, are not made for the seafaring life. The Duke was in a pretty pother. What to do, how to rally his queasy, retching Squires. Harold, with his two clear eyes and his host arrayed, lay not four miles ahead. . . .'

*'Oh, Mr. Dormant, how prettily you put it.'*

'I describe no more than the bare truth, Madam. In that crisis, in that moment of destiny, the Duke, who remained master of himself, looked about him, saw in the rear portion

of the ship—what would now be known as the poop—a simple gentleman, honestly accoutred who, alone among all present, was silent—for the good reason that he was asleep. “*Mais,*” cried the Duke. “*Regardez—il dort, celui-là . . . il est dormant.*” In a single instant, panic, Madam, gave place to a deep calm; for none now dared to vomit in the presence of such amazing equanimity. The landing was made. It was successful. The results are to be read in our history books and that, Madam, is how we came by our name, but it was “a damned near run thing,” as the Duke was heard to say.’

‘*How very extraordinary, Mr. Dormant . . . but, tell me, didn’t the Duke give your ancestor any land?*’

‘Madam, until the reformation, we preferred to be men of God.’

When the train reached Cuxbridge, its terminus, Dormant, putting an end to these private dreams of triumph, descended, his manner bold and able. He had no difficulty whatever in identifying Miss Caroline Vandeleur: this young and personable lady stood beside the newspaper bookstall, and was only too apparently awaiting the arrival of a person unknown to her.

It was therefore the more rebarbative to Dormant that she should direct her enquiring glances towards the various commercial travellers who preceded him; equivocal, seedy, and be-mackintoshed men who had undoubtedly come here to sell liver sausage to the local grocers.

He took up position beside, but slightly behind her. Miss Vandeleur was a well-made young woman, and made upon the scale to which years in the Mediterranean basin had accustomed Dormant. Her face, it was true, was not her paramount beauty—the lips, for instance, suggesting a certain petulance of temper—but the line of back and



haunch and breast were admirable. She was perhaps twenty-five years old.

"Hullo," he said.

"Oh, are you Mr. Dormant?" Her voice was brisk: but it was also warm.

"Yes."

She led him past the ticket collector, through the booking-office, and towards a very old Rolls-Royce car.

"I haven't seen anything like this since I was last in the Science Museum," said Dormant as he installed his baggage.

The girl made no reply. She drove carefully, negotiating the many tradesmen's vans in the main street of the town, raising a gloved hand from time to time, apparently in signal to acquaintances.

"Is Lady Drawbridge nice?" ventured Dormant presently.

"I like her," said Miss Vandeleur.

"What about Lord Drawbridge?"

"I think you'll find he's more interested in his market garden than in literature." She looked sideways at him.

"Where is Sonia?" she said.

"Sonia?"

"The girl in that book of yours."

"I don't know," said Dormant. "I daresay she married the corn merchant in Athens. That was what she seemed likely to do, wasn't it?"

Miss Vandeleur let in the clutch. There was a sharp and rising bend ahead: "So, when the book is over, the people are over too for you?" she said.

"You can't expect me to follow them all their lives," said Dormant.

"You follow your own life, don't you?"

"Yes—but that I'm obliged to do."

"It's a pity you think on those lines," she said. "You'd write much better if you didn't."

Dormant was silent. Five minutes ago he had been happy: now he was no longer so, with this calm, this too calm girl, putting her tape measure over him.

He pointed to a mare standing with her foal beside her in a field: "That's pretty," he said.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Miss Vandeleur.

Dormant felt impelled to consider the question of heredity. The morbid defects, it was now generally understood, were transmitted more easily than the qualities of resistance. If this were, in fact, the case, heredity must assume the guise, infinitely more terrible, of a fatality destined to wreak ever-increasing harm upon the long line of the demented, the epileptic, and the unsure of destiny.

"This was once a part of Oxfordshire," said Miss Vandeleur. "A kind of enclave in Bucks: you can still see it in old maps."

"Oh, yes? Did it belong to the Drawbridge family?"

"Don't be stupid," she replied. "You must certainly know that they came straight from Tynesend to Palmerston."

You sit beside me, thought Dormant: you sit beside me with your shapely legs and your foot on the pedal, and your animosity toward me is great and, apparently, instinctive, because you imagine that I am a man who takes a brief and outer view of other men, and then writes about what he claims to have perceived. But what you don't know, darling, is that my wife ran away from me, that my mother died of tuberculosis and that my father killed himself.

"I used to know your wife," said Miss Vandeleur, almost as if he had been handing her his thoughts upon a piece of paper.

"Oh, did you?" he replied, with apparent calm, but all the same his heart leapt nastily. "I thought no one did."

"We shared a room in Athens for almost a year."

"Not every night—surely?"

"No," said Miss Vandeleur, "not every night." She drove more slowly so that she might turn and look at him. "Why did you never write about her?"

"But I did. She was that Sonia you've just mentioned."

"No one would recognise the portrait."

"I daresay that's often the way," he said. "When the painter's hand is trembling."

"I thought she was a very nice girl," said Miss Vandeleur, "but I suppose you didn't find her sufficiently," and she raised a hand and drew invisible whorls upon the wind-screen, "complicated," she added.

"I don't think I've any statement to make on that subject at the present time," said Dormant. He paused, then: "Nor at any other time," he added.

"That's quite all right," said Caroline Vandeleur cheerfully. "I only mentioned it because I think it would have been hateful not to tell you that I knew."

Knew? Dormant gazed at the sodden and dromedary humps of a field seen for five seconds: a field in Buckinghamshire, England. He would never see this field again perhaps, but at the same time he never would forget those peculiar contours, nor the goat standing immobile with its head silhouetted between the two ridges. He might live for eighty years, cursing the necessity of his last two decades, but every time he saw a goat in the middle distance he would think of this moment; subconsciously often . . . but, at other times, with the full and lancing hurt.

"I'm sorry you know that about me," he said. "It's the one thing I always hope to hide."

Miss Vandeleur made no reply, perhaps because she was busy. She had been, in fact, obliged to halt the car because there was a herd of sheep ahead.

Dormant lowered the window. He watched the shepherd,

an old man, who carried an authentically crooked stick of a design unchanged since the time of Saint Peter. Who made such things, he wondered? One stick, presumably, would last a shepherd an entire life-time. There could not be much money in stick-making.

"A nice day," he called.

"*Deetowadder . . . Deedowodder*," said the shepherd to his sheep.

"What is he saying?"

"It's probably Latvian," said Miss Vandeleur. "Nearly all the farm-workers round here are displaced persons."

She drove on. Dormant sat in silence, pushing back remembrance into recesses of his mind as if they were old clothes spilling out of a drawer too full. The last time he had seen Helen had been in a bar in Athens about six months ago. He had been sitting on a stool and talking—just talking—to one of the girls. A girl who came from Ikaria, an island which he wished to visit. After a while, he had heard a laugh behind him and, turning, had seen Helen at the other end of the bar. She was with a man, but it was not at the jokes of this man that she was laughing—but at her husband, Dormant.

"That's the place," said Miss Vandeleur. She pointed. "Do you like it?"

"Yes, what I can see through the trees."

At the entrance to the drive two black dogs, identified by Dormant as Labradors, loped towards the car. They were old dogs, heavy of paunch and jowl, and something in their furtive approach belied their happy barks, their enthusiastically wagging tails.

"*Pedlar! Gamester! Down, sir.*" A man wearing overalls, perched upon a step-ladder, turned, and shouted these entirely unnecessary warnings to the dogs.

"Your host," explained Miss Vandeleur dryly.

Lord Drawbridge held a pair of shears. He had been cutting ivy. Tendrils of this sombre plant which encased his home, apparently, on every side, clung also to his forehead, lay askew his thinning hair: nor did their presence there seem incongruous. Lord Drawbridge, a man of perhaps fifty years, of abundant and euphoric health, had an undeniably Bacchanalian air about him.

"Are you Dormant?" he said affably. "Yes? Well, please go in, will you. I'll join you at sherry time. Too dirty just at present," and with a wave of the shears he turned his back upon them and began to clip once more.

"I hope I'm not going to be asked to do anything like that," said Dormant as he followed Miss Vandeleur into the hall.

"I rather think you'll get enough work cleaning the dust out of the library," said Miss Vandeleur. She opened a door. "This is the morning-room," she announced. "If you wouldn't mind waiting, I'll tell Isabel you've arrived." With a nod she was gone; a rather truculent young woman who seemed to find subtle amusement in Dormant's situation.

Dormant himself found none whatever: there was damp in this house, he would swear it, and quite evidently neither pub nor village within walking distance. A pile of papers on the table attracting his attention at this point, he examined it. The pile consisted of rent receipts. Dormant gazed despondently at the open-brick fireplace, at the diamond-paned windows. My God, he thought, what have I let myself in for now. . . . Where is Oxford, is there no town at all in sight? He rushed to the window but not even a single church spire was visible. Down, gently down from the house the ground sloped, first to a lawn, then to an abandoned tennis court beyond which lay a series of buildings suggesting a productive small-pig farm; finally to a

green morass, lined with spectral and scrawny firs, in which a herd of cattle were paddling.

In a corner of the room stood a service lift. Dormant began to play with this contraption idly, stroking the trays, fingering the ropes, the pulleys. Well, possibly they ate well, he thought, endeavouring with thoughts of roast lamb to console himself. Yet, on the lift itself, he could discover no relic more interesting than a few crumbs of burnt toast, and a beer stain. . . . Outside, on the lawn, the two dogs passed, sniffing at the withered daisies. I suppose I shall have to buy myself a pair of gum-boots and take those bastards for a walk, he reflected.

*"Well, what is it?"*

He turned, startled. The voice had seemed to come, not from within this room, but from some subterranean region. Then he perceived that, inadvertently, he must have pressed a button, set the lift in motion. He stared at the black hole in dismay, and mumbled . . . "nothing . . . nothing."

*"But, Ay-drian . . . how nice to see you."*

He turned once more, this time thoroughly alarmed, as he possessed good and grave cause to be, for the woman standing in the doorway was Isabel Fowler, whom he had last seen on the night she had burgled a bakery in Southern Italy.

"What in God's name are you doing here?"

"But, Ay-drian . . . I'm Lady Drawbridge, your employer, dear."

## *Seven*

"Sit down, Adrian. Stop pacing about. You look like a caged animal."

"I am a caged animal. You have brought me here under

false pretences." He turned upon her furiously. "Put that bloody lorgnette down: you're not at the opera. Where are your children?"

"They're in America, dear. Tom has just been made a Major. Betty's to be married in the fall."

"And your husband?"

"Why, I think he's somewhere in the garden, dear."

"I'm not talking about that one."

"Oh, you mean Ha-arry." Lady Drawbridge caressed a china ornament upon the mantelpiece. She looked at Dormant with an expression which could only be described as winsome. "Why, Harry's still in Turkey. I guess he kind of likes the life there."

"How the devil did you become a Countess?" said Dormant. "That's what I want to know. Have you given up bakers?"

"Now don't be coarse, Adrian. You always were such an earthy, sensual man, and time doesn't seem to have improved you."

Time, however, had laid but benedictory hands on Isabel Fowler. Her figure was neat, her eyes were chipper, her forehead barely limned by lines of age or malice. '*Mother is petal fresh and squirrel neat,*' he had once heard the daughter say, half enviously, and half in raillery. It was a true description. Even in the old days, in the dust and dirt of San Bernardino, Isabel, whether engaged in domestic squabble or flushed from the recent embraces of her rustic lover, had always remained imperturbably spruce.

"I met Arthur in Ankara," she continued, in reply to Dormant's question. "He's quite a distinguished geologist among other things."

"Then he should have learnt to look more carefully under stones," remarked Dormant. "All right . . . go on: what happened? The last time I had news you

were with some fellow who manufactured whipped cream."

"He was a Kurd, dear, but that was all a great mistake. I knew the moment I set eyes on Arthur."

"On his title, you mean, don't you?"

"Oh, he didn't have the title when we met. Then his uncle died, and after that his cousin. It was all quite unexpected."

"Are you telling me this is a love match?" said Dormant, seriously.

"Why, yes, Adrian . . . whatever else did you think?" Isabel paused, and gazed at him reproachfully. "You really do have a low, nasty mind. What's life done to you that you should be so bitter?"

"I'm not bitter," said Dormant. "It's the medicine they give me." He smiled at her. "But surely the other fellow didn't take this lying down, did he?" And, in fact, Dormant found that the most astonishing fact of all. The discarded husband had been among the most possessive of men. Dormant had once seen him guard an old toothbrush from a chambermaid who could have used it to black boots. With how much greater ferocity, therefore, would such a man fight to retain a wife, long since relegated, perhaps, to the rôle of his baiting partner, his *victim*, but nonetheless the dearest of his chattels because alive and not inanimate, capable of suffering.

"Harry did make some trouble at first," she admitted, "but Arthur is tough." She smiled, as if at some remembrance. "You know, when two men meet in that kind of circumstance it always reminds me of tom-cats on a wall."

"How curious you should put it in that way," said Dormant. "But you really mean a roof, don't you?"

Isabel looked puzzled. "On a roof, a wall, up a chimney-stack, it's the same thing, isn't it? They both growl and growl, giving you their repertory, but in the end one of them



always backs away. You barely see his haunches move. It doesn't look like a retreat at all—but that's what it amounts to."

"I know," said Dormant. "It's one of too many things I've seen in other than the metaphorical sense." A new thought occurred to him: "But what about your daughter—Betty? Whose side was she on?"

"Why, mine, of course," said Isabel. "Girls always see themselves in every bride—even when she's mother."

"D'you know, Isabel," said Dormant slowly, "I'm beginning to think that I like you very much—and what is much more terrible; that I admire you."

"Well, you certainly never showed it in the old days."

"I didn't have much chance to, did I? Tell me anyone you know who doesn't leap at the chance of being priggish when he sees people making idiots of themselves?"

"No, that's true enough." She gave him a strange and somewhat melancholy smile. "But it's the new days now, and I want you to be part of them, Adrian. That's why I'm very glad you're here."

"Maybe—but just how much of my being here is a coincidence?"

Isabel looked surprised. "Why, Adrian: you replied to our letter, didn't you? How was I to know it was you who put that Ad. in?" Her expression of innocence was genuine.

"Well, you didn't expect me to know who Lady Drawbridge was; did you? There were hundreds of letters. I answered the one which seemed to suit my purpose best."

"But, Adrian, you're not *sorry* to see an old friend, are you? I can't tell you how I chuckled when I saw your handwriting," and she chuckled now at the memory.

"May I ask whether Arthur chuckled, too?"

"Even more than I did. Arthur doesn't mind my past at all, dear. You'd better abandon any hopes you had of

blackmail. He's been looking forward to meeting you ever since I told him how the baker beat you up."

"My God, you don't mean to say he knows he's married to a burglar?"

"Arthur knows everything about me—and he likes it, too."

"Then Arthur must be a remarkable man," commented Dormant.

"He is, too," said Isabel, and there was a note, if not of defiance, at least of admonition in her voice. She stared at Dormant rather as might have stared some gifted and yet honest fortune-teller who hesitates to inform a nervous-looking client that a dark man is about to defraud him.

"You're letting your waist-line go, Adrian."

"A few weeks with your pigs will put that right."

"How long is it since you last lived with a woman in a real home?"

"Really!" protested Dormant, "I hope it isn't your intention to place me at the mercy of a couple of your land-girls?"

Isabel examined him coolly. "Adrian," she said. "You don't want to end as a lonely old man, do you?"

"Why ever not? Believe me, it's a great mistake to think that sensualists acquire a nagging habit which they carry with them into an unsavoury senescence. In most cases the apparatus wears out. Even when it doesn't, its employment is either accompanied by increasing disgust or tempered by recurrent bouts of Christianity."

"But that's exactly what I *mean*, Adrian. Think of the police court, the cells, your fellow-prisoners—violent criminals perhaps—averting their heads when you come in, refusing to share their cup of soup with you . . ."

"Look here," said Dormant. "I have the instincts of a normal man, no more. I refuse to be treated as if I were a

prowler in public parks. If you wish to sustain some improbable thesis about married life, by all means do so, but don't cast me as Frank Harris."

Isabel sighed: "I suppose a man like you kannt imagine what it means to a girl to find true happiness at last," she said.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. From my observation it generally implies an unobservant husband and a steady bank balance," and Dormant grinned at her. "All right, Isabel," he said. "Spill it out and let me see. Not your bag of tricks, of course," he warned her, "I think I know most of them already, but the other one full of newly-minted money which only people in the secret will change—for I expect you've found that happiness is un-negotiable."

And so, rather doubtfully at first, then with fluency, Isabel told him of her love and of her marriage to this man, met, it would seem, on the extreme edge of the abyss, perceived whilst standing there in contemplation of the awful depths, his errand her own, yet himself not previously encountered because arrived at the site of ultimate desolation by another road.

Listening to Isabel, Dormant reflected that if the act of writing implies, as Valéry maintained, a sacrifice of the intellect, then conversation with women required an utter abdication of the critical faculty. Women spoke—not always, certainly, with approbation their aim—but invariably, with omission, simulation and self-complaisance as their weapons, they strove to obtain an emotional effect upon their audience.

Drawbridge had been a widower of more than ten years seniority when the pair met on the cliffs of Dormant's metaphor. The man's first wife, in youth a moneyed beauty, became in a childless middle age, an envious and hateful slattern. A German bomb had disposed of her physical

presence with the same finality with which she had, herself, while alive, disposed of and spent the proceeds of her many reputable shareholdings. The bomb, however, could not dissipate the malignant influence which she left behind her. Some men, it is true, can only love once, but this is due less often to any praiseworthy fixity of purpose than to the fact that many such men, like the bee, are only equipped for a single venture in that sphere.

Anguish . . . *anguish*, thought Dormant, the discomposure of the senses, the aching dolour of the night, gnawing dread of loneliness, the . . .

"She must have been a really hateful woman," said Isabel. "Not only hateful in herself, but a blight to all around her. D'you know that when I first met Arthur, he was completely lacking in self-confidence, never dared to talk about his work unless obliged to, and when he did so, blushed and stammered like a little boy?"

"You mean she never cared for geology?"

"No one asked her to devote her life to it, but when your husband happens to be a very distinguished man in his chosen sphere I think the least his wife can do is not to sneer at him. Why, only the other day, when Arthur was asked to read a paper to one of your British Societies, he was nervous as a schoolgirl cast as Juliet. The poor old fellow just kannt get around to thinking that anything he has to say may be of interest."

"Her methods may have been open to discussion," said Dormant, "but surely the results are admirable. I don't know any geologists but I've been paralysed with boredom by lawyers on torts and doctors on drugs and even civil servants on red tape. But did you say he was asked to read a *paper*? It's a thing I've always wanted to do: I could think of some beautiful subjects, too."

"Dear Adrian," said Isabel. "You were always so tolerant

as long as it was someone else's toes that were being squashed, and not yours. Do try and get into your head that this is really the case of a man living again: a man who thought he was dead."

"It seems such a pity the Bible never tells us the full facts," said Dormant. "Quite obviously, Lazarus's wife also took the credit for it all as soon as he got home and was prepared to listen to her." He gazed at her amiably. "Don't think I'm unsympathetic, Isabel," he said. "If you're happy . . . I'm happy. I always did think you were a person who wasn't planning for the life she deserved."

"I don't deserve this one," she said. "I don't deserve anything except a nice length of rope or a tube of something. That's what he saved me from . . ."

"You must learn to look at these things from the standpoint of the dromedary," said Dormant. "You are proud of your hump: it's sharp, it's shiny, but I am a camel, and *my* humps are not only twofold, but much more monstrous."

"That man," she said, "that *Harry*! Twenty-four years of him; a whole quarter-century with a husband whose attitude to life was like that of a child who's stolen a screwdriver and is taking the hinge off every door in the house."

"I wanted to ask you," he said. "Do you ever think of the other one . . . the first husband?" Dormant, himself, had thought many times of this man, of his strange and shocking death, with ribs stove in beneath an office file. Supposing . . . oh, only to suppose for the merest fraction of a moment that such people, cut off unfulfilled and well before their prime, and neither dust nor damned nor angels of the fifth degree of precedence, could see, could *feel* each separate future action of the persons whom they loved, what agony they must endure, and what tribulations.

"Yes," she said. "I often think of him."

"Quite so: but how? When the General grows very old,

he forgets his battles, even all the bugle calls, but well does he remember the spring morning, and even how the sun was gleaming on the bayonet of the sentry, when he joined the regiment for the first time."

"That boy was my morning sun, too true," she said. "I often think he would have added up to something, but the sun is never standing still, I'm told, and—come to that—they change the sentries every two hours in the best armies, don't they?"

"You're my clever girl," said Dormant. "You're my clever-clumsy, touching little dreamer."

"I can see his face any day I want," she said. "All I have to do is look at his child. The upholstery is just the same, but the manufacturers seem to have found that kapok for the stuffing doesn't leave a reasonable profit margin. My little Tom is full of horse-hair."

Dormant considered the question raised: even if one admitted that the example of the adult had a direct influence upon the child, that little Tom hates his step-Daddy because the big, hairy giant occupies the morning warmth of Mummy's bed, that little Adrian hates Mummy-cold-in-clay because Nurse has told him, while smearing dripping on his tea-time toast, that Daddy will never get over the terrible loss . . . even if one admitted this, then it is still only too probable that suspicion and fear have been thrust into the children's minds by the Cook and the Nursemaid, those separate narks. To imitate the adult is but another means of making known the child's dependence upon him. Yet can a child, indeed, imitate an emotion such as that of fear? More especially can he imitate it when the fear is a false fear, portrayed by many a grimace upon the features of the housemaid (cook, nurse, or kindly neighbour) but not felt in her playbill heart?

The child learns early that even the emotions can be

successfully imitated; the child who has been hurt wants from his mother, initially, not the comfort of her bosom, but the comprehension of the heart which beats inside it, the man wants from the woman peace in a hinterland too long ravaged by war. But the woman does not want in any written, stated terms. Her claims may change, diminish or increase, from day to day. She is the plenipotentiary of Nature.

"Now tell me about the ancestral book," he said.

She looked at him, relieved perhaps that, when poised, seemingly upon the very brink of dissertation, he should cease to prattle metaphysically and speak instead of banal subjects.

"It's quite simple," she said, "Arthur's great-grandfather—whose dates incidentally, were 1821-1896—was the son of one of those Generals, friends of the Duke of York, whom Wellington was obliged to send home from Portugal because of their incompetence. There was very little money in the family in those days and what there was seems to have been spent on getting Sir Thomas Lawrence to paint pictures of them standing like a football team, shrouded in gauze, on lawns. I think the family came, originally, from Durham, but with you British—it's surprising—but one can never be too sure. All your dirty fortunes and most of your blue blood seem to date, not from the Conquest at all, but from the day Sir Robert Walpole discovered that each man had his price."

"We still had the sense to burn the Capitol in Washington about that time, though, didn't we?" said Dormant, with vigorous innocence.

"Yes," she said, "and the old man was on that job, too. That's how he came by the peerage, incidentally. But that still didn't mean that there was any money in the family to go with the coronet. In fact, they say that the week before

William IV was crowned he ran around London offering heaven-on-earth in six months to the Jews if only they'd lend him enough ermine to make up his gown. The boy—he was the only boy, and the issue of the old man's marriage with a cousin of Leigh Hunt's: no doubt, that's where the talent comes from," she interpolated this genealogical information at double speed. Women, and also certain writers, make considerable use of the parenthesis, "the boy was sent to Haileybury, which was then a kind of 'Crammer' for India."

"How do you know all this?" enquired Dormant.

"My dear, there's almost nothing in the library we inherited, except de Tocqueville and Balzac and various lives of Clive and Warren Hastings. You can well imagine that, having little else to do, I've been reading up the story of your country's dusky rapes. I put the *Reminiscences of Tippoo Sahib* in your bedroom by the way. I'm sure he'll keep you happy when you're sleepless," and she smiled at him.

"Get on with the boy, please," said Dormant, who disliked prolixity in others than himself.

"Well, as you know, India was run in those days by a particularly efficient form of private enterprise: the famous Company. It was quite the custom to retire with fifty thousand pounds, though, of course, without a knighthood. No competitive exams, no knowledge of algebra required—a cousin on dining terms with someone in the India Office was quite sufficient. This boy, the great ancestor, reached Bombay on the day that Victoria married Albert. Six months later, learning of the coincidence, he noted it in his diary. That was characteristic of him. In 1857, when the English troops were firing Indian mutineers from cannon, he asked an artillery sergeant to tell him the exact composition of the explosive charges used. He noted that down, too; before he went to Lunch."



"You don't seem to care very much for the old gentleman," said Dormant.

"I've never cared much for sanctimonious people, who are perfectly certain that they're in the right."

"You should look at it professionally," said Dormant. "They provide people like me with wonderful material."

"Perhaps," she said, "but that's why I hate Thackeray and Dickens so much. Stupid little men, with all their genius, living in an age which must have been a novelist's dream, and yet what were their real ambitions? A lecture tour, an extra dollop of porridge every morning for orphans in State Institutions, a review in *The Times*, and plenty of brandy, and at least four sixpences in everybody's plum pudding at Christmas."

"It's always fun to hear the New World talk," said Dormant, "though I think they might talk a little less if it were generally known that Mark Twain stole several of his friend's fishing rods and that Thoreau howled with pain and behaved like a child when scratched deeply by a bramble in the woods he loved so much."

"If it comes to that," said Isabel, "Zola himself spent a week of agonising indecision because he couldn't make up his mind to pay out Sadi Carnot francs for a fumed-oak side-board." She struck him with a hard look. "You writers are all the same at bottom," she said, "and bottom is the word, because you sit on it all day and let a piece of metal go up and down across a piece of paper."

"My dear," said Dormant, "don't be too hard on us. After all, for one who sits wriggling in his grandstand seat and muttering '*Why did she do it, damn it?*' there are ten more out there, clapping moist hands on your shoulders, and telling you that the little panel you provide will help to make the great mosaic of contemporary life."

He stopped, and looked up in her direction. Hitherto, he

had been looking at his eyebrows as reflected by the polished surface of the table. "Let's go on talking about the bloody old man," he said. "That would be more healthy."

"No, it wouldn't be, Adrian. Not just for the moment, it wouldn't be."

"And why not, please?"

"I don't know . . . I don't know . . . I don't know. I know nothing, really. In fifty years, I haven't learnt a thing except that when people wear the face that you're wearing at this moment, they don't mean any good."

"But I do mean good, you know," said Dormant. "Except when I smell evil."

"This old man was married late in life," she said. "His wife died long after him. The last holder of the title was her son. Arthur is not a direct descendant."

"And didn't the last Drawbridge have sons?"

"Yes—two, but wars dealt with them. One went in the First War, and the other in the Second."

"I see."

"But what happened to the first wife?"

"Oh, she just died: of the vapours perhaps or another one of those Victorian illnesses which no one can identify. She was much younger than him as I say, and seems to have been kept closely guarded, almost sequestered while she did her needlework and manufactured children."

"He was jealous?"

"It was the mainspring of his character, if one is to judge by his novel. Don't you think there's something rather curious about a successful man of over seventy—for that was his age when he began it—who, instead of occupying himself, as he well might have done, with his memoirs, sits down to write what is obviously a disguised autobiography and then, when he's finished, destroys almost a quarter of it?"

"I like to see the patient before I diagnose," said Dormant. Then he added: "So he did destroy those pages personally? They were not just lost, somehow?"

"Well, some people, and Arthur among them, believe that the surviving wife may have burnt those pages after the old man's death. She probably had good reason to do so, but the snag to that idea is that there would have had to be connivance on the part of the faithful family solicitors, and that seems unlikely."

"Does it much matter? I mean, to me, either theory is equally attractive."

"It matters quite a lot, Adrian—it matters to about the tune of twelve thousand pounds at the present market value of Suez Canal shares. The old so-and-so left a proviso in his will that his book was to be published sixty years after his death and to make quite sure of it, he tied up a nice fat parcel of his money until it appears."

"But this is most interesting," exclaimed Dormant. "It's almost as good as Arabia Lawrence and *The Mint*, although I hope there's not so much bad language." He grinned. "So it's not a pious family duty at all, as I imagined, but a question of hard cash, is it? I fill in the gaps, and prune and polish: you and Arthur can live for a few more years in the style to which you weren't accustomed."

"Yes," admitted Isabel. "I'm afraid that's about it."

"Then I must say I think you are paying me in the most niggardly manner. What! Seven quid a week to produce a masterpiece for you. Won't you think again and give me fifteen?"

"My dear Adrian, you don't seem to realise that we can only just about keep our feet out of the bread-line ourselves until we get this money. The seven pounds you're sniffing at adds up to the summer holiday we won't be having."

"And how right you are! Who would want a holiday

when they were living in a lovely place like this?" And with a sweep of his hand Dormant indicated the rain-bespattered window-panes, the sodden lawn, the distant trees and the lugubrious, huddled herd of shorthorns.

"Come on," he said. "Let's have some cakes at least before the unsaleable begins to struggle with the unreadable."

## *Eight*

"WELL, what do you think of it, my dear fellow?" Arthur Drawbridge held the storm-lantern high above his shoulder. Shadows clashed with shadows on the walls.

"I think it will suit me very well," said Dormant, and, indeed, he was pleased that this pavilion in the garden should have been placed at his disposal. Here, with only a telephone extension to connect him with the house, he must enjoy a certain measure of independence . . . and of privacy.

"Stove's going full blast, as you see," said Drawbridge. "Soon chase all the damp away. We'll move you in tomorrow."

"Splendid," replied Dormant with a reciprocal heartiness which he was beginning to find exhausting. Small talk with Lord Drawbridge had proved an uneasy affair from the moment of their first, official meeting before dinner. Dormant had difficulty in believing that this man had, at widely-separated moments of his life, brought himself to demand the hands of two women, in marriage. Drawbridge was more than merely shy: at the first threat of serious conversational engagement his mind appeared to flee, bearing with it all baggage, all impedimenta, and leaving only glazed eyes and an inane grin to confront the threat of

his security. Yet, at the same time, the story of the two Englishmen who, left alone on a desert island, did not speak to each other for twenty years for want of a mutual friend to introduce them, could not be applied to Drawbridge: on the contrary one felt that he would have approached his companion in misfortune immediately and with a timid guffaw and an air of quiet desperation addressed him unerringly, upon the one subject which that man held to be the nadir of tedium.

"I've left the old man's book and all the relevant papers for you in your bedroom at the house," he said now, and the reference to a business matter cost him, apparently, a considerable effort of will power.      o

"Thank you," said Dormant. He reflected that, were it not for the fact that the book must appear during the next year he might well, had he chosen, have stayed in this man's house—another Swift ensconced in the home of a more timid Temple—for the rest of his lifetime. "*Getting on all right with it?*" his patron would shout, from time to time, as they passed each other in a corridor. "*Rather! I did fifty-seven words today.*" . . . "*I say, that's good.*" Clearly, Lord Drawbridge could never bring himself to face a problem at once so odious and so intimate as that involved in the sacking of a member of his domestic staff.

He led the way now, in silence, his lantern swinging, along the gravel path, towards the house. The two dogs, his inseparable companions, followed: despondent animals, who groaned and twitched in sleep and wiped their paws upon the doormat when entering the home of human beings.

In a doorless room, the curate's egg in shape and in degree of comfort, masked from the hall by curtains, sat the two ladies. Miss Vandeleur was weaving the red tail of a Chinese dragon on a panel of tapestry, Isabel was playing patience.

"We don't need any men here," she said. "Go into the

library and get to know each other," and, as Dormant demurred and Caroline, observing his hesitation gave him a look at once quizzical and mocking, she added: "Don't worry. I've put the whisky by the fire. Alcohol, and stones, and love are the only things which *can* make it seem worth while to Arthur to leave the shell which is pinching all his tender parts, although he never will admit it."

The library had not, under the previous ownership, been a library at all except in the sense in which a railway station waiting-room is a place in which the imprudent do occasionally wait. Bookcases ran along but a single wall, but the place of honour upon the immense and threadbare carpet was occupied by a shrouded billard table. The literary tastes of the penultimate Lord Drawbridge had been nautical, it seemed. The collected works of Captain Marryat, in cloth, and those of Conrad—more esteemed no doubt—and therefore bound with the hide of innocent and virgin ruminants, lay stacked, now, in a corner: their dusty inches on the insufficient bookshelves occupied by textbooks of a more serious and scientific order; yet even in these selective activities the present incumbent, cramped for space, had been obliged to perform acts of rank favouritism. A *Guide to the Galapagos Islands* had won for itself shelf space, but no less than three Guides to Easter Island lay on the cold parquet in uncomfortable proximity to the works of the Polish charlatan. De Tocqueville and Balzac had been retained from former times: a fact which caused Dormant no great surprise for he had many times remarked that persons who, in general, read few works of fiction, and who take some pride in their almost total abstinence ("I *only* read *biographies*, dear . . . *usually*") tend, nonetheless, to attach themselves to some one writer in that too frivolous medium. With Dormant's father, it had been Trollope; with a maternal uncle Thomas Hardy. Both men had been

vehement in defence of their respective totems, and the uncle more particularly so: "*You can say what you like about 'Tess',*" he had been in the habit of declaring, "*but tell me another book about the countryside in which you can smell the fresh cowpats in every line?*" \*

"Whisky?" enquired Arthur now when they were seated in arm-chairs before the dying fire. His host's manner, Dormant noticed, had undergone a subtle and no doubt meningeal change, and was now shyly affable, but with undertones of conspiracy and of venial sin split upon a fifty-fifty basis. Just so, imagined Dormant, might a member of the omnipuissant, the occult and Masonic body—to which, alas, he never would belong—make the first overtures to a promising recruit.

"Thank you," he said, and was delighted to observe that, besides the Scotch in the decanter, there was also present a bottle of the Irish Sendaway, John Jameson.

"I always take it with milk myself," said Drawbridge. He proceeded to do this.

"They say there is nothing more fattening," observed Dormant.

"Very likely, but apart from the paunch, which is natural in a man of my age, it doesn't have that effect upon me, you know." Arthur blinked. "My nerves get rid of each surplus pound. I worked it out on the scales in the bathroom once. Even the effects of the heaviest dinner—duck, for example—are gone by lunch-time."

Dormant said nothing. He noted his glass of John Jameson; but did not touch it. He was reminded of occasions when, persuaded that it might be a good idea to see how the other half of the world *looked*, he had drunk nothing but soda water at parties. Throughout two thousand years the tourists tramp about the hot waste of sand, finger the eroded stone and the sun-crinkled pages of

their Baedekers. The tourists are right. One day the Sphinx must speak.

Looking at the man who lay sunk in the arm-chair, Dormant thought of the excellent advice proffered by H. G. Wells to a young writer who confessed that, after a promising début, he was now stuck in the middle of a manuscript: *"Take it by surprise. You work in the mornings? Good . . . let several days pass without a line, then come upon your book suddenly in the middle of the night, and you'll write the best page of your life."*

Dormant had often done this with his own work. The results had been somewhat less spectacular than those prophesied by the Master, but of this the explanation was probably the chronically turbulent state of Dormant's mind at the midnight hour.

He now decided, faced with another relapse by his host into silence to try the effect of the Wellsian stratagem upon human material. Leaning forward, his voice at once deferential and yet containing a bantering note which could at any moment be reinforced should escape become necessary, he begged leave to ask whether Lord Drawbridge believed in God?

"Eh?" said Arthur. He put down his whisky and looked at Dormant in amazement.

Dormant repeated his question.

Arthur chuckled. "Upon my soul," he said, and chuckled again. "Upon my soul . . . are you pulling my leg? I don't recollect having been asked such a ridiculous question since," here he paused, and reflected. "Since I lanced and bandaged a nun's poisoned knee, many years ago, in Kabul." He blinked, and took a sip of his drink. "Poor woman: she quite certainly feared to be thought immodest, but at the same time she had seen, at first-hand, something of the effects of gangrene. And so she asked me that question



—for an ulterior motive of course, very much as you ask it now, I daresay—because to carry on theological back-chat you have to keep your face turned upwards.”

“Is it really such a stupid question?” enquired Dormant.

“My dear fellow, who am I to say? Some very noble men—Thomas More and Pascal—have believed in that proposition, but on the other hand some equally noble men have believed in an idea as manifestly absurd as the human millennium. What you really mean to ask is not about God, but Sin, isn’t it?”

“How do you know that?” Dormant watched Arthur Drawbridge care’s the back of one of the recumbent dogs, with a slippershot, and hoped that he had, not inadvertently touched upon one of those secret *dadas* which produce a torrent of words from even the most taciturn of men.

He looked up. Arthur was watching him. There was a faint smile upon the elder man’s face. “Sin,” he repeated, and such was his tone that he might have been discussing some game which Dormant preferred because of a natural aptitude for it. “Yes, I suppose there’s no doubt that there we have the problem which tortures you most.”

“I really can’t say that I ever give the matter a thought,” said Dormant, but there was no denying that the tables had been neatly and unexpectedly turned. He was upon the defensive.

Arthur chuckled. “Nonsense,” he said. “You have been here four hours, but I have been looking at various kinds of men for over forty years. Many of them were Mohammedans, too: and therefore by nature impassive, which is surely the last claim which you would make for yourself.”

“But who or what does one sin against?” asked Dormant. “That’s the problem, isn’t it?”

Arthur observed him with surprise. "But against oneself of course," he said. "At any rate, in the first instance." He continued to caress the sleeping dog. The second dog which was awake, and watchful, crept closer to him, for this animal, too, desired the saving toe. "To my way of thinking," he continued, "Sin is merely an interpretation of that law of equilibrium which decrees that every excess and every nervous surfeit must be paid for in due course, sometimes morally, sometimes physically and sometimes even in both these ways. In so far as organised religions have understood that idea then I think they may claim to have made man's fate on earth considerably less rigorous, but where they have enabled clever and pushing men to oppress other men in the name of moral codes, then I must admit that I consider them deplorable."

"Do you consider yourself deplorable?" said Dormant.

"I can't say that I take much interest in the subject," replied Arthur. "I am a person whom I inhabit. I would like to have lived inside a somewhat different person, but there is nothing I can do about that except shut trap-doors on various heads which I don't consider opportune. When we go to the circus we see seals performing, balancing balloons upon their noses. There is a lesson for us all there. It is very improbable that the seal likes balloons, but that he likes a stale pound of plaice I don't think we can doubt for one moment."

"And do you tie it all up, geologically, and draw professional conclusions?" asked Dormant, and he sighed. All his lifetime, he, who could not draw a straight line, nor mend a fuse, nor recognise a discord in three notes of music . . . all his lifetime Dormant had desired to be the complete man, another Leonardo, second and last of that species. Something *tangible*, he thought: Baron Bunsen had possessed many serious defects but he had at least invented a gas-

burner of the existence of which few men can go through life in ignorance. Keating, with his invaluable powder, had fixed the frontiers of a frightful plague and saved countless and multi-coloured millions from the recurrent itch of scratching. Eastman, with a small black box which clicked when correctly caressed, enabled us to remember how Auntie looked that summer day when the ice-cream cone split and the blobs of frozen custard stained her chin. It would be so pleasant to be Faraday, as well as Zola.

Arthur, although remaining silent for some two minutes, continued to observe his guest, and, more than possibly, he discerned his trend of thought.

"When you were all living in San Bernardino," he said, "at what time of day did Isabel usually go to see the baker?"

"It depended very much on the movements of her husband," said Dormant.

Arthur refilled the empty glasses: his own with milk and whisky. Dormant's with whisky, alone. "When one is as cruel as you are to other people," he said, "shouldn't one be without pity for oneself?"

"Certainly," said Dormant. "And so I would be if it wasn't for the long list of subscribers."

Arthur sipped his drink. He raised both feet, and in this way was able to caress both dogs, simultaneously: "I am going to tell you something that I have never told anybody else," he said, "and which I have known for the last seven weeks."

"Are you quite sure that is wise?"

"Oh, perfectly. Pedagogic phraseology is invaluable when one is dealing with the question of one's private feelings." He paused, then gave with his feet both dogs a jolt. The slack skin ran in folds, not unlike tidal waves, up their curv'd, and submissive spines.

"Very well. I am listening," said Dormant.

"I am tired of the earth," said Arthur. "Dry land covers, after all, so little of our planet. I am interested, now, in the sea."

"I'm very glad to hear it."

"Do you ever think of all the dirt, the human and animal dirt which must have been deposited on the earth in, let us say, a million years?"

"Yes," said Dormant lightly. "Often, but a great deal of it evaporates, I'm told, and the odour is the first to go of all, isn't it?"

"Around coral islands," said Arthur, "there are large quantities of mud which is almost pure calcium carbonate. This mud is formed from the remains of once-living creatures, some of which were microscopic in their lifetime, and only became visible to human eyes by the multiplicity of their rapid deaths. When the moon is at her greatest strength," he added, "then the mud is carried out into deeper water."

"It's what I've always said," said Dormant. "Without you scientific chaps where would we writers go nowadays for allegory and apophthegm? Is this the first time you've been captured?"

"The sea, alone, is interesting," said Arthur, "because the sea, alone, preserves. Do you realise that the animals and plants which live on the sea-floor receive a constant shower from the dead remains of floating and swimming organisms which are swilling round and round on their way towards the ooze."

"No, I did not, but now you mention the subject, I think it might be awfully useful to me."

"Of course," said Arthur, "there is increasing pressure in the sea and so what arrives at the bottom, in deep water, is never quite the same as when it left the top."

"No," said Dormant. "I suppose it isn't."

"At the greatest depths," said Arthur, "all the calcium carbonate has been dissolved and only the atmospheric dust survives. We call that red clay though it isn't red and never was clay at all."

"Like night soil," suggested Dormant.

Arthur blinked at him. "The clay forms very slowly," he said. "How slowly you can judge for yourself from the fact that the teeth of extinct species of shark have been dredged up from its surface: in millions of years not enough clay had been formed to bury them."

"Or maybe the dredge bit deeper than you think?" suggested Dormant.

He could hear a telephone ringing somewhere, the noise muffled by many intervening doors. The sound did not disturb Arthur. He said that one day—next year, perhaps, when he had a little more money—he would visit Christmas Island in the Pacific. This island was no more or less than the flat summit of a volcano, fifteen thousand feet high from a base on the sea floor, and consisting of limestone terraces which ranged in geological origin from Eocene to Recent. Arthur described the succession of events which had given rise to the present terraced structure. The telephone continued to ring: then the noise ceased, and presently Caroline Vandeleur came in, and said that the call was for Dormant.

"For me?"

"Yes, from London."

He excused himself and followed her across the hall into a small and gloomy place which had once been a gun-room, to judge by the racks, but which now sheltered raincoats, picnic baskets, and several tattered butterfly nets.

"Yes?" he said, placing the black thing against his ear.

"Mr. Dormant? This is Mr. Mendoza speaking."

"Well, what about it?"

"I've got to see you. We're in a jam."

"How d'you mean . . . jam?"

"Listen, Mr. Dormant. That system of yours: it was for four-year-olds, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"Well, it's the jumping season now, Mr. Dormant, not the flat, and every God-damned horse they have running is more than four years old."

Dormant reflected. He turned to Caroline, who was standing in the doorway: "Is there a pub with rooms anywhere near here?" he said.

"There's the '*Coat of Arms*' in Wanborough."

"Go to the '*Coat of Arms*' in Wanborough—Cuxbridge is your station—and stay there," said Dormant into the telephone. "I'll come and see you."

He put down the receiver.

"Were you as charming to your wife as you are to your friends?" said Caroline. She followed him across the hall towards the library. "Don't bother to try the handle," she said, "he's quite certain to have locked the door by now."

Dormant did try the handle. The door was, in fact, locked. He looked at Caroline in some astonishment. "But why . . . ?" he said.

"When he talks too much he begins to feel guilty. If you'd stayed with him he might have gone on for hours, but the slightest break in continuity brings up the *doubt* in his mind. You'd better go to bed. Isabel went up there hours ago."

"Yes," he said. "I think I will."

Caroline came upstairs with him. Outside his door, they paused: "I hope you have everything you want," she said. "I changed the water in your carafe, personally."

"Very kind of you."

She stood, leaning against the passage wall, considering him. "You look so tired," she said. "And yet I suppose you find sleep difficult?"

"Not to begin with," he said. "The first three hours are easy. Then I take up a book, or a pen—or a glass of something."

"You must be fond of summer," she said. "The nights are shorter. It's warm enough to get up and walk about."

"Yes, I prefer the summer."

A clock, somewhere inside the house, struck twice.

"Tell me something," she said. "Why don't you divorce her?"

"By what right?" he answered. "She never did me any harm."

"Well, it couldn't be for lack of evidence, at any rate, could it?" she said.

"I did once think of it," he replied. "For desertion, you know. But she let me know that she would immediately answer with a petition for the return of conjugal rights. Rather good that, don't you think?"

"But if you were prepared to humble yourself, you could prove . . ."

"What could I prove? It's something that only she and I know." He stretched out an arm and touched her forehead lightly with his index finger. "It's frightening, don't you think," he said, "that there should be things which just one man and just one woman know?"

"Good night," said Caroline.

"Good night."

## Nine

DURING the course of that night, having occasion to rise from his bed, Dormant made his way down the passage, and after some initial trouble with linen cupboards, obtained relief from his trouble.

While returning to his room Dormant was astonished to observe a figure standing in the passage outside a bedroom door, the which, not being his own, his suspicious nature immediately assumed to be that of Caroline Vandeleur. The figure, which stood immobile, was that of a man in late middle age of a distinctive rather than a distinguished appearance: and the light in the passage being weak and far distant, the complexities of shadow ensured that Dormant should observe no more than a drooping moustache, a large nose of the pattern once known as Roman, a pair of black eyes of a most extraordinary melancholy, and the upper half of a form of attire which was suitable neither to that time of night nor to that time of year, and which appeared most curiously to resemble Court dress.

"Do you want something?" said Dormant, never backward with an insult.

The man stared at Dormant. "No," he said, "not just at the moment, but it was essential for you to see me."

Dormant shrugged his shoulders, or more precisely, one of them: a movement habitual with him when perplexed, pugnacious, or merely ill-at-ease. He entered his room. He lay down in his bed. Five minutes later he raised himself on his elbow and applied his ear to the wall. No sound could be heard save the faint dissentient sibilance of a woman's snore.

Breakfast, in that house, was celebrated at the fixed hour of



eight o'clock for all save Lord Drawbridge himself who, following the example of another discriminating Peer consumed only a glass of soda water and some biscuits at that time, and even these in privacy, away from the sight of men.

Warned overnight by Isabel that he would not be served if he descended late, Dormant presented himself, pink of face and punctual, apprehensive and on time.

A gladsome sight rewarded him: for not only were there chafing dishes on the sideboard, within which kidneys, bacon, liver, simmered above the blue flame of little lamps, but his hostess, also, was installed wearing a dressing-gown of suspiciously masculine cut while, upon her left, sat Caroline with shapely posterior happily outlined by trousers.

"Sit down, Adrian . . . did you have a good night?"

"You know I can't talk in the morning," grumbled Dormant. "It's my only British quirk of character."

Nevertheless he possessed sufficient energy to swallow cup upon cup of black coffee, rapidly emptying the percolator until the relict of black mud showed low and wet in the spherical contraption. He helped himself to kidneys and munched and ground with pleasure. '*Abattis*, these and kindred organs of the body animal are called in France. The more categorical English describe them as offal.

"Well, Adrian, how are you feeling?" said Isabel, after some conversation with her secretary concerning eggs. "Don't look so bilious, dear. I'm sure you've bags of books in you in the last resort if you could only shake up your liver bile."

"What resort is that?" said Dormant.

"Southend, I should say," said Caroline.

"I saw a man in the passage last night," said Dormant, ignoring the jest. He had the satisfaction of seeing Isabel glance sharply at Caroline.

"What kind of man?" she said.

"Just a man," he said, and was curious to note that Isabel did not seem to wish to pursue the subject.

"Well, I must be off and do some work now," he said briskly, rising.

"I'll walk across with you," said Isabel. "We must be quite sure that our breadwinner has everything he needs," and despite Dormant's polite mumbles she insisted on accompanying him, in dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, across the lawn.

Throughout that morning and, indeed, throughout the entire day—with only a brief break for luncheon—Dormant read the manuscript which it would be his duty to complete. The handwriting of the second Lord Drawbridge was neat, a trifle crabbed perhaps, but always perfectly legible. There were few corrections and these for the most part consisted of a word or phrase scored through by the pen.

It is possible, with even the greatest of authors—with Balzac for example—to discover the points at which they have stopped work for the day. The break in the sequence of their thought may be almost imperceptible, but it exists, and may be observed by those who care to study the matter closely. Furthermore, a slight change of style, the weight of emphasis thrown perhaps on a single word or phrase; these reveal, to the trained eye, interruptions of another order. A character blows his nose, or coughs, yet this is not, as it might seem to the uninitiated, some device intended to ease a long flow of dialogue: the author has been ill, has not sat at his desk for several days, and now, wheezing and snuffling, is taking a mean revenge upon some unfortunate personage of his creation who had hitherto seemed to enjoy a perfect equilibrium of health.

Money troubles, domestic upheavals, emotional dis-

turbances of every kind: if the stigmata left by these on a man's work can be discerned even behind the lines of print, how much more clearly must they be visible in the original manuscript where each pause of the pen reveals the secret travail of the unwritten thought?

Employing these methods of detection, as he read—and he read with increasing interest—Dormant calculated that this manuscript had been written, inclusive of the eighty missing pages, within a period of about four months, with one major interruption, probably of about a week in length, and due to some emotional disturbance of great violence. In point of fact Dormant did not have to employ unusual powers of deduction in order to learn this last fact. Like every self-respecting writer this one, also, had taken good care to finish a chapter before dealing with the private problem which agitated him. The quotation with which he had headed, in a somewhat shaky hand, his next chapter, afforded a clue as to the nature of that problem for it consisted of the advice given by Flaubert to Maupassant:

*'Be careful with sadness. It is a vice. We find pleasure in chagrin, yet when the great chagrin is past, since we have used up precious strength in it, we remain besotted.'*

The book, a novel, was clearly autobiographical and, as is customary in works of this nature, written in old age, the hero is first seen as a youth, on the threshold of life, at the age of eighteen: in this case at the Indian Civil Service 'cramming' academy of Haileybury, *circa* 1850.

The author's original intention had been to produce a light novel into which he might incorporate descriptions of some of the more interesting events of his own adventurous and varied life. Why he had not written a straight autobiography was to become clear to Dormant only in the later stages of the book: the man was too good and, above all, too

virulent a hater. In the closing chapters—whenever the theme which obsessed him permitted a momentary diversion—there were at least a dozen highly actionable portraits of men who had been contemporaries and who were therefore, presumably, still living at the time when he wrote.

When a man is very old, and his physical powers are as diminished as his range of feeling, it is said that he remembers most clearly those events in his life which occurred between his fifteenth and twenty-fifth years. The tragic case of Marshal Pétain affords a recent example of this law. Incarcerated within an island fortress the prisoner imagined that he was once again a young Lieutenant of *Chasseurs Alpins*. The troops who were his gaolers appeared to his enfeebled mind to be the members of the first platoon which he had commanded.

But Pétain had then been truly in his dotage and could barely hold a pen, much less direct the thoughts with which to drive it. Inside Drawbridge the mind had remained alert and here had deployed, upon the subject of his youth, a vigour of reminiscence, the results of which Dormant found incredibly tedious—so much so that he reflected how curious it was that men of this type who spent their entire maturity condemning the generations who followed them should, in the decline of their lives, view their own youthful follies with an indulgence so arch.

In the book the name of the hero was Locke. He is first seen lying in bed, surrounded by his collection of bulldogs, and in so sound a sleep that the porter's knock upon the door must be twice repeated before he wakes up with a 'Hullo, what's the matter?'

'Time to get up if you want to be at chapel, sir.'

'Oh, hang chapel, I can't turn out yet: let's have curried soles and hot rolls for breakfast, and see that the rice is well-cooked.'

Locke does not possess a robust constitution. The Indian climate, in which he spent the first eight years of his life, tells severely on the very young. Thus sent to school in England he came in for a vast amount of bullying which, since his was a peculiarly sensitive nature, told injuriously upon him. He retired within himself, made few friends, and was avoided by his companions. Nevertheless, he was not entirely a misanthrope: he could be jovial enough in company and sing as good a song as any at a wine party, but he neither sought nor cared for the society of his fellow-men—thought a good deal, indulged in day-dreams of the future, and enjoyed life in a manner altogether different from others of his own age.

At this point, Dormant sighed: inflexibly he thought of his own first novel; not the one which Maurice Welsh had seen and recommended, but the other, written in his twenty-second year, and which publishers as disparate in temperament as the celebrated cat-fancier Michael Joseph and his publishing colleague, Gollancz, had declared to be; the first of that puissant persuasion: *'promising but chaotic'*; the second, as one more in touch with modern, psychiatric theory as constituting *'a most useful manual of masochism as practised in a minor British Public School.'* This manuscript had lain, after these rebuffs, for many years beneath the bombs in the archives of Curtis Brown Ltd. of Covent Garden, until one day Spencer, second of that line, not grown pompous as all literary agents are inclined to become at about the age of fifty had written to enquire, since he was clearing surplus papers from his premises, whether Dormant wished to have it back or whether he preferred the two pounds weight of quarto to be sold to a reputable firm of rag-bag-men. Dormant had replied that the second of these solutions most suited him. He had received a cheque from Spencer—dated, when at Cambridge, for his early marriage and his practical

jokes—a cheque for the sum of one shilling and sixpence. And Dormant, whose practical jokes were even more practical, and who had observed that the cross-lines of ink upon the cheque were drawn carelessly had, with his own pen, inserted two other numerals beside the shilling sign. Nor had Spencer seen fit to lodge complaint: another Richard to a paternal Oliver, he possessed within himself many of those virtues which had made his father the first and greatest of all literary agents, and now could not bring himself to strike down a man at the urgent outset of a literary career.

After a slow start the novel improves. Out with his dogs one afternoon the misanthropic Locke observes, to his horror, that these ferocious animals are about to attack a charming young lady, herself immobilised by fear, in equivocal posture, while about to cross a stile.

The acquaintance, so rudely made, ripens rapidly. Not many days later, Locke has made so much progress that he is able to possess himself . . . of the lady's hand, which she endeavours, though feebly, to withdraw.

"For God's sake Miss Clavering, do not hastily reject my suit. Give me, I beseech you, some hope. The smallest pressure of your hand on mine will suffice to make me aware of my happiness."

For a second, there is no sign, but then Locke felt the little hand he held press his own, and in a rapture of delight he caught this lovely girl in his arms and imprinted on her blushing face that first kiss, the raptures of which, when man loves deeply, no words—or, at any rate, none which Drawbridge can produce—seem adequate to describe.

"Good gracious me . . . is this how you behave in the conservatory." It is Mamma; prudent and watchful. The guilty pair jump hastily aside. They raise their eyes towards

those of the portly old lady standing by the greenhouse door—it is a small place really, without orchids, and all three are horribly cramped for space—but Locke is equal to this occasion as to so many others subsequently.

An interview with the stern father is arranged, in the course of which Locke is obliged to listen with what patience he can muster to a long harangue on the responsibilities of married life and the necessity of working hard. When this is over he is at last permitted to make his way to the drawing-room where, blushing divinely, sits the lovely Gertrude.

They are now betrothed.

Being of a lubricious as well as of an enquiring turn of mind, Dormant, after having read several of the novels of Miss Charlotte Yonge, had once visited the Victoria and Albert Museum where he had gazed long and most earnestly at the exhibition of ladies' dresses of that epoch which is situate on the ground floor. How the devil could one lift those skirts, he remembered thinking, and how, without risking painful abrasions against whalebone, how in the name of Eros, insert one's hand within those corsages? Could it be that the virtue of a D'Arcy or a Domville was genuine, because imposed by circumstances . . . could it be that, themselves encased in trousers designed not for comfort but to expose the contours of their shapely calves, these gentlemen had bitten their lips in order to suppress emotions as unworthy as they must have been self-evident?

But love is not all . . . Locke must also work lest, in his examinations which lie but a short time ahead, he find himself 'plucked'. He obtains an assurance from Gertrude that she will write to him each day, and she does so. The pair meet only on Sundays now, and even then in damp fields surrounded by surly dogs. The fact of the matter is that Locke must not only improve his knowledge of Sanscrit,

Hindustani and Persian: he must also pass sufficiently well in, these subjects to satisfy his father, a terrible and quite merciless man who stands, it would appear, with the traditional shilling clasped in his hand, ready to fling it at his son should he fail.

Meanwhile, since this is after all a romantic novel, an incident occurs involving that reliable and ubiquitous Victorian character: *the bully*. A weakling, the bully's essential concomitant, is being subjected to indignities in a passage. Locke intervenes, and although effecting a rescue, receives in the course of the general scrimmage, what is described as a 'facer': in other words his nose is put out of joint by the flashy signet ring worn by his opponent.

Yet all ends well: indeed, Locke, himself is the first to say so—'*My darling Gertrude,*' he writes. '*I have passed, though by the skin of my teeth. Your lovely image is before me day and night. I long to kiss those ruby lips once more yet—alas—I remain a prisoner in my room, having met with a severe accident which has disfigured me so frightfully that I dare not show my face to you . . .*'

He must, however, show his face to someone: should it only be to the scout who appears on the morning after Locke's last and celebrative wine party, with a plate of curried kidneys skidding round the toast on a tray.

"Get up, Mr. Locke. For God's sake, sir, hide in the old hollow elm in the quadrangle. Your Governor's here, sir."

"Take that damned meat away and bring me soda water," shouts Locke—in whose defence it must be stated that it was quite customary for the more gently born to speak rudely to the lower classes in those days.

General Locke, the stern father, is in fact outside. He is a short man, as upright at seventy as in his youth, and without a vestige of that rotundity which usually accompanies age. Thirty years before, when informed by his prospective



father-in-law that the girl whom he proposes to marry shall never have a farthing, the General—then a mere Cornet—replied: ‘D—— it, sir; I’d marry her if she had not a second shift to her back.’ His ideas concerning the future of his own son are, however, somewhat different.

“Where did you come by that face, boy? Some disreputable scrimmage, I suppose. And what do you mean by engaging yourself to a penniless girl, sir. An adventuress, perhaps.”

“Hold, sir,” says Locke. “I cannot hear Miss Clavering spoken of in this way. I am fortunate, indeed, to have gained her love.”

“Love be hanged! You boys are always talking and thinking about love when you ought to be filling your heads so that you may fill your stomachs. Your philandering after women has led to your occupying the distinguished position of second from the bottom in your term, sir.”

“But, Father——”

“Don’t ‘but’ me, sir, and get the servant to take those d——d dogs out of here. Do you wish to have a millstone round your neck all your life in the shape of a wife and a heap of brats. You will get hopelessly into debt in India, sir, be unable to come home, and die there.”

“Thank you, sir,” replies Locke proudly. “If, as you say, I am to die in India, then you will be troubled by neither my wife nor my brats for they will be provided for by the pension fund. There are, however, certain tradesmen in this town who have trusted me, and whom I would be obliged if you would pay. Needless to say I will remit you the money which you dishurse from my first month’s salary.”

Yet, once again, all ends well. The duns are paid. Locke’s passage to India is booked and Gertrude is invited to London to make the acquaintance of the General; who becomes enamoured of her.

"By God, boy, I'm glad to see you have blood in your veins. She is the loveliest creature I ever saw, and if ever you neglect or ill-treat such an angel you will rue it, and never have a farthing."

Halcyon days, but they must end. Presently, all parties concerned in the tale are bidding each other adieu about the huge steamer, the *Soullampton*, the decks of which present a picture of the utmost melancholy. On all sides stand groups of people in deep grief. Here, a wife, too delicate to accompany her husband to India, sits by his side, saying the last sad words of parting. Over there, a grizzled old Colonel is surrounded by his numerous children whose ages represent a living catalogue of the dates of his home leaves—by his side a widow rocks herself in anguish as she clasps the hand of a young cadet. Even the very officers of the ship, though accustomed to these scenes of sorrow, could not but help participating in the general depression.

The lascars alone, hurrying here and there, carrying out the orders given them by the boatswain, appeared unmoved. At length the dreaded shore bell rings and all must quit the ship who are not sailing in her. The two men, father and son—the one in his prime, just starting in life, the other fast hastening to his grave, stand with hand clasped in hand, and since they can hardly hope to meet again in life, it is almost like a death-bed parting:

"Good-bye, Jack. Be steady, my boy. Recollect what I have said. God bless you."

"Good-bye, Father. Thank you for all your goodness to me."

Presently, the paddles move. The vessel is leaving. Handkerchiefs are waved and, among the throng on shore, Locke sees his father raise his gold-headed stick, in token of farewell.

"How are you getting on?" said Caroline.

"I'm enjoying myself thoroughly: it's all about love."

"Yes, I know: I've read it."

"Then perhaps you can tell me what happens next?"

"Miss Clavering will be seduced, and subsequently abandoned, by a heartless scoundrel. Mr. Locke, your hero, will marry another, a sweet little wisp of a thing, the contours of whose bosom already give promise of womanhood."

"So do yours, if I may say so." Dormant served himself from the pot of coffee which Caroline had brought him. "It's going to be terribly difficult to imitate," he said.

"Oh, come now," she said. "I'd have thought that would be the least of your worries. After all, you've imitated so many people."

"Yes, dear—but that was unconsciously."

Caroline sat down. She looked at him above a line of finger-tips laid like a fence across her nose. "You don't seem to have eaten much of your lunch," she said. "It's cold in here, too, and that stove smells."

"Would you like me to draw the blinds?" he said. "Then we'd be more cosy, and I could imitate Casanova."

"D'you really think you're so irresistible, Dormant. Do you shave in the dark, or something?"

"Well, I seem to be, to you, don't I . . . or is it merely a healthy curiosity?"

He came across the room and stood beside her. "Well?" he said.

"Don't be a damned fool, Dormant."

"I'm not a damned fool. I just know where I'm going, and you're carrying around with you something I want. Where's Isabel?"

"She's in High Wycombe."

"You see!" He took hold of her.

"The wood-worm knows where he is going, Dormant. So does the death-watch beetle—but they both live upon a diet of rather musty sawdust."

"Yes," he said. "I love a philosophical discussion myself, but not just now, if you don't mind." He pulled her out of the chair and across the room towards the divan. He turned back the bedspread.

"Those sheets look none too clean to my unpractised eye," he said.

And Nature looks upon herself in us, creatures without shadows, and the two sons of Noah cover the nudity of their drunken father, yet because they do not dare to stare upon his body, they approach him backwards. And when the body is ashamed of its thought, then the thought is ashamed of the body's desires.

"It is quite true," she said. "You can do what you like with me. How did you know?"

"I didn't know I just wanted to. Didn't you feel my heart hammering?"

"It's funny," she said.

"I don't think it's funny: I think it's fun."

"I mean it's funny that you can do what you like with me."

"Yes—me—and how many ghosts besides?"

"Those ghosts are all dead now," she said.

"From this minute?"

"From long before it, I should say, darling."

And there are dangerous realities in all that we imagine, and from behind each door and at the corner of each road, a phantom may spring upon us with irredentist claws outstretched.

"Who was that man in the passage?" he said.

"What man?"

"You know the man I mean . . . last night."

"But I don't know, Dormant. I haven't the least idea what you're talking about."

"If there's some bloody mystery in this house, I shall get to the bottom of it," he said, but for the moment he was prepared to leave the man in abeyance.

Yes, it is another fear, another anguish that we feel, another doubt when we see around us, alive, tangible, and in good health the creatures, the spirits and the monsters which our imagination has devised. The human mind is ceaselessly astonished by its own powers of fabulation, and with a shiver, asks itself . . . *"And supposing that what I imagine were inefficacious for my trouble?"*

"What d'you think would have happened," he said, "if our friend, Locke, in the book had proceeded to these extremities with the beautiful Miss Clavering?"

"The father would have come with a horse-whip."

"Have you a father?"

"Not now. . . . not really"

"These sheets may be clean but they're definitely damp."

"Well, they must be quite a change for you, Dormant. One gathers you generally make love on rocks beneath olive trees."

"I don't make love: I love."

"Yes, I notice you're very single-minded."

"That's right. Let's stop the nervous chatter and get on with it, shall we?"

And if each caress were the stroke of a butterfly's wing and each touch but a bucket bringing brackish water from the depths of a well, would that be love?

"I suppose, you'll now try to put the grip on me, Dormant?"

"Why should I do that?"

"Because all men do."

"Just how many men?" he said.

"Three."

He ran his hand down her back, down her long, smooth back, ran his hand down her back until his fingers, splayed and trembling, felt the last flat bone, the coccyx: "It comes with time," he said. "It comes with time: don't jump the starter's pistol. That's what I was always doing. Look," he said. "There's a fly on the ceiling. How very odd, in winter."

"You choose a nice way to go about things, though, don't you?"

"It's a way I learnt at ladies' knees."

"But don't you *want* to love?"

"These days, I like to make it first. There's always time to see about romance a little later."

So that if God were obliged to destroy every occasion and every temptation of evil, He would have to destroy, first of all, our five sensory feelings, then the sixth sense, which few can define . . . then the moon, then the sun, then the spangled and limitless firmament, and perhaps, finally, our souls as well, for the soul, too, may be a pander to sinful behaviour.

But the Devil finds work for idle finger-tips.

"We might as well keep it all of a piece," he said. "You must get up now. It's time that I got on with that book."

"My dear boy," said Ashford—he was an exceedingly elegant man in early middle age and, from Gibraltar to Malta Locke had been admiring the neat trim of his mutton-chops—"My dear boy, how green you are! Don't you see that Mrs. Skinner has taken a fancy to you? You young civilians are the catches of the East, and as for Mrs. S., her dances are the best in Bombay."

"She need not angle for me," replied Locke, "for I assure you, sir, that I am not matrimonially inclined."

"In that case I should advise you to securely fasten the bathroom door next time or you will be joined in the tub by your elderly admirer. Ta-ta, then, for the present."

Dormant had always held in abhorrence that plague of all writers, the transitional chapter. He had discovered, like so many of his fellow-practitioners, that it is one thing to put a man on the run, or on his way to play golf, or in a hurry to see his fiancée, but quite another matter to get the fellow there within four pages. The character must go to Victoria Station, decide whether he intends to travel first or third class—this is particularly ticklish because endless social implications may arise from a faulty decision: he must buy his ticket, speak to porters, regard the departure indicator, and, finally, enter a carriage which is undoubtedly full of other people whom the writer, if he is in any sort of ebullient form that morning, will feel impelled to describe.

And all this, however tedious, is necessary, for if the reader, whose natural inclination is to skip pages anyway, is not pinned down to his job by a series of unoriginal remarks such as . . . "Yes, sir." . . . "No, sir." . . . "*A week-end excursion ticket might be better for you, sir: it's only eleven and tuppence,*" the writer, who badly needs him in Dorking, for the best scene in the entire book, may discover that he has left his precious friend behind in stuccoid Bayswater.

It was perfectly true that such problems arose in a form much less acute in Dormant's own books. One of the pioneers, one of the first to realise that, with a fair display of Balkan Station names, a dark girl, and a dash of espionage, one could write a perfectly acceptable novel about a man travelling by train from Skopje to Salonika, he had always found that reference to local culinary customs could titivate when the description of the signal boxes tired:

"I (He) was surprised to eat a red tit, fried, at Veles. This bird,

*much praised by Brillat-Savarin, is known in Provence, as the beguinette. Its flesh is slightly bitter. The poet, Martial, celebrates its excellence with these words: 'Si la fortune l'envoie un beguinette au croupion tendre si tu veux bien faire, saupoudre le de poivre . . .'*"

And, by God, I always will, Dormant remembered thinking, when he read that text in the *Larousse Gastronomique*.

Malta, it seemed, possessed at that time many places deserving of a visit, although the same can scarcely be said of the present day.

With Ashford as Cicerone, Locke made a brief tour of the island and Dormant was left with the impression that, even after a lapse of forty years, the writer could well remember the resentment which he felt, then, at the elder man's display of experience and knowledgeability.

But much worse was to come. "*There are few sights in this world more striking,*" writes Locke, "*than the bazaars of Cairo.*" But alas! driven by the indefatigable Ashford, Locke, aboard a donkey must quit those narrow streets where women are mere bundles of white linen, and negroes, black as night, lean Arabs with fringed capotes, and turbaned, bearded solemn-looking tradesmen have almost persuaded him to buy a carpet.

The Pyramids, then as now, are the attraction: one simply cannot set foot in Bombay unless one has, about two months previously, set eyes upon the Sphinx. Yet the trial, it must be said, is most severe: "*Odours, most diversified and in every case disgusting, fill the air.*" Locke's donkey bolts and is within what was known at that period as '*an ace*' of running over a woman enveloped, as has been described above—only too fully—in white.

"Why must these amateurs spoil their best effects by a precocious exposure of them?" thought Dormant.



In Locke's place there can be no doubt that Dormant would have had the *hourri* meet him at midnight beneath the very jaw of the implacable stone image, with results which could not possibly have caused pleasure to the Irish censor.

Nothing of that kind occurs, worse luck. Locke is merely thrown from his mule, deserted by his companions, and finally abandoned in the cold night of the desert with no company other than a bottle of native brandy upon which he performs such execution that, upon the following morning, when rescued and brought back to Shephard's Hotel—even then extant—he presents the most pitiable appearance in one who must now undertake the long journey across the desert to Suez—for, of course, the canal has not yet been cut.

In Aden, Locke receives a second 'facer'; this time while amicably discussing with a trader the price of a *tarboosh* which he proposes to despatch as a memento to Gertrude. The actual blow is delivered by a *sepooy* who, foaming at the mouth, has undoubtedly become so crazed by the rigours of garrison life in that inhospitable *lien* that the mere sight of a white man—even of Locke—is sufficient to unleash the dark forces of his folly.

It is some consolation for the reader who has already identified himself with the hero of the book, we hope, and who is by this time drinking the very sand in his tea, and sharing, as it were, the flies in his curry . . . it is some consolation to the reader to learn that, at this stage, the insufferable Ashford is removed for ever by a fatal bout of fever: that unidentifiable ailment so prevalent in Victorian fiction, and of which Dormant himself, invoking the omnipresence of the *Anopheles* mosquito in parts of Greece, had not disdained to make use, when confronted with a character who had grown beyond his small powers of control.

"Lord John will do something for my poor mother," are Ashford's last words.

He meant Lord John Russell who, in point of fact, did nothing at all.

Caroline came in again, at about six o'clock.

"Well, how are you getting on?"

"I'm still here. You can see that. Come and sit down."

"There isn't any chair there."

"There isn't meant to be. I put it in the corner half an hour ago. Your chair's my knee."

She sat down: "I do think a man who has as many pads of fat as you, about his person might arrange to have a couple on the place I have to sit."

"Sit down, all the same."

"Dormant, what are you *after*?"

"This, to begin with . . . and then this, and then *that*, and then perhaps something not as tangible at all."

"You might take the trouble to explain yourself, Dormant—or can't you ever be articulate on this particular subject?"

"This one?"

"Yes, that one."

"All right, then, what is it?"

"It's part of my chest."

"Quite so. And what am I doing to it?"

"I don't know. All the best ladies' magazines say that if a girl looks down there too often, she'll get a double chin."

"Yes, but what is what I'm doing, *doing to me*?"

"Oh, my dear Dormant—I'm not Gray's *Anatomy*."

"It isn't my fault," he said. "My grandfather became a father for the last time at seventy-two, and nobody in the neighbourhood sniggered."

"So you just have this priceless gift, have you, Dormant?"

"Yes, I have, but somebody—it must have been that bad fairy<sup>h</sup>—mixed up the prize list. You've no idea of the kind of girls I've given *Vanity Fair* to."

"Poor Dormant! There was once a little boy, and not even Mummy could understand him."

"That's enough about Mummy."

"No, it isn't, darling: if you'll allow somebody who likes you to tell you, Mummy is the root of all evil."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

Yet the origin of his trouble, the nostalgia for a lost world, cannot, in itself, exhaust a man because, not irreparable . . . because, to the travail of the conscience, Death will bring the remedy. Nor is it in death alone that we find the well-known formulæ of redemption: that final joke does not suffice. To regret, remorse must be added. The creature, swept from Heaven, must know that he is riveted to Earth.

"I always begin badly, he said." "What a cad, the reader thinks, but about page 200 you sometimes see him sneaking over to my touchline. The little women with whom my heroes get involved end up well on top, in spite of what you say."

"It's your revenge, darling. Besides, writers always write about themselves."

"Don't you believe a word of it. Most writers write about themselves as they would like to be. They have to put women in their books, too, and since women always talk about themselves, that complicates their problem."

And it is the idea of God which dominates the psychical elaborations of each man: God, inscrutable generalissimo with supreme command over Nature and the movement of each muscle who, if He sees fit to be benevolent, may give back to the children of sin—fleetingly and in the tremors of

love alone—that plenitude of happiness which was theirs—or so the wise men say—before the Fall.

“But why did you choose to start in that nasty way, Dormant? Wasn’t it a dirty trick?”

“Why? How did those other three start? With soggy cakes and cups of tea, and hot hands in the cinema? When you see what I see, you clear the ground first—and then you start to build.”

“Dropping bricks all day, too, I suppose? You really have a lovely manner, Dormant.”

“Just an honest one, dear.”

“No, not honest at all. I daresay you think you have an affectionate nature, but what does it all mean in the end except that you don’t like to be alone in the night?”

“It means this, just to begin with.”

“Oh . . . *that*.”

“Oh, you laugh at *that*, do you? What d’you want me to do . . . write a poem, play the guitar all night beneath your window-panes, take a berth on a banana boat to the Amazon and let my broken heart be broken further beneath the fangs of crocodiles? You bloody women are all the same. If I had as many legs as the centipede and wings as well, I might be able to express myself differently. As it is, I just have to make my impact felt in the same way as every other man.”

“Dormant, there are higher things . . .”

“Oh, yes? You must tell me about them sometime. We could look at some Breughels together, I suppose, or discuss Apollinaire. Well, I’m sorry but those are just the kind of things I’d much rather do all by myself.”

“You see! Women just aren’t human beings for you, but merely fabulous creatures with something you haven’t even got the courage to do without. Why don’t you grow up, Dormant?”

"Because I don't care for the society I'd have to mix with for one thing, and because I like my little mud pies for another."

The night has two faces and Death is not the darker of them. Man is incapable of sustaining that synthesis which his God requires of him. There are no frigid women but there are many frigid men. Because Man is unable to bear his too heavy load he creates, himself, new divisions in the plan of Divine unity. God and the devil become associated with anthropomorphic questions, of which neither are qualified to judge.

"And if it were true," he said, "if it wasn't just make believe, if I said I loved you and would live this down. If I said you really were my sleeping beauty and showed you all the bramble scratches on my knuckles that I got pushing through the forest looking for you?"

"I should ask for time to see."

"Ah . . . time . . . the final enemy."

But where is Locke?

Ah, where, indeed!

Locke is in a ballroom in Bombay. The hour is late. The ladies are toying distractedly and in an essentially Anglo-Saxon manner, with their fans; the gentlemen are chewing—some sandwiches—and some, the accessible portions of their moustaches. It is one of the laws of literature that, in a novel of this kind, the hero must be constantly accompanied by a friend and confidant, who will record, and sometimes even be allowed to cap his witticisms, and also—this last a simple affair of protocol—make notes paginal in length of his emotional deficiencies.

Ashford, as we know, has been destroyed—every author is a potential Attila—in Aden. His place has been taken by a man named Forsyth: surely a clear proof that Drawbridge

wrote before Galsworthy brought literature within reach of the English upper-middle-classes.

Suddenly, Locke grows pale. In those days of straight gin and water this was not by any means a considerable feat, at that hour of the night.

"By gad, who is that wonderfully handsome fellow?" he says.

"That," replies Forsyth—who is not, of course, described personally, so that we have to *imagine* him—"that is Stewart, of the Fourth Bengal Irregulars, who is on his way to England on furlough. They say he is the greatest lady-killer in India—ha-ha—though, for my part, I don't believe one half I hear."

But we believe it, though. After all, this is *that* for which we have been waiting.

What is it which makes Locke's face acquire the colour of imitation art paper as his friend, Forsyth, vanishes in the crowd—bound, we are bound to hope—upon a natural rather than an unnatural errand?

*Stewart.* Yes, that was the name which he had more than once heard Gertrude's mother mention, as belonging to a distant relative of her family, in India. She had spoken of him, when enumerating her Indian connections, as a very handsome boy, but Locke, not being particularly interested in the reminiscences of the old lady, the matter had passed out of mind.

But we know, do we not, because—if we were not inveterate novel readers—we should not be reading this one—we know, because we have a certain experience in these matters, that Stewart is quite certainly going to steal Gertrude from Locke, and that, unless there is a little local colour provided, we shall be exquisitely bored throughout four chapters before that climax is reached.

But Locke's troubles are not, upon that fatal night, over:

the distant cousin of the cherished girl is about to proceed on leave, but Locke, with the taste of hot coffee still rancid in his throat, must proceed to his lonely and isolated home.

It is a very extraordinary thing that when peaceable and timorous men have performed one single energetic action in their entire adult span, they must bore their friends—until they die—with various versions of it.

The house which Locke occupies is in a lonely position. It is outside the crumbling ramparts. He has been warned that he should select less isolated quarters but, with the obstinacy of youth, he declines to be guided by the advice of his elders.

That night—when already his soul is troubled by the first mention of what we already know must be a fatal name—he returns to his home and proceeds, although quite unprepared for sleep, to bed. . . .

At one o'clock Locke is lying on his left side, looking at his room and, in a dreamy way, glancing down it. Can he be dreaming, he asks himself, or can what he seems to see be a deeper reality? Two dusky figures have appeared. They pass between Locke and the night-light. They are bearing something, which each holds with his two hands, by the bottom.

"*My money box*," cries Locke. With one bound he is outside the bed. The loose state of the mosquito curtains facilitates his rapid exit. With a second bound he rushes at the thieves who, dropping their prize, make for the door. One man escapes—in a *twinkling*, even—but upon the other, Locke is able to lay urgent and retributory hands. Alas! the native's body, covered with oil, slips through his fingers like that of—what?—why, of an eel, of course.

"I'll frighten them at all events," thinks Locke. His loaded rifle is not far from his pillow. He is, however, a

Victorian, and therefore a humanitarian. Although the fugitives are at his mercy, he aims well to one side. The ball strikes the loose earth of the race-course and plummets of loose earth dance beneath the moon.

Some good proceeds from these events. Henceforth, Locke, reverting to his first and—as it will be seen—his most enduring love, keeps two large dogs at night in his room.

“Do have some more of that port, my dear fellow,” said Drawbridge.

“But, Arthur,” said Isabel, “I know there are only two of you, but aren’t you passing it round the wrong way?”

“I have held since my beardless youth,” replied Drawbridge, “that my way was the only way, and that everyone was out of step except in my slow march. I can afford, morally at all events, to hold that point of view today, though I will not deny that in previous times it occasionally made life difficult for me.”

“I still think you might at least let me wash that decanter, or whatever it is,” said Isabel. “It’s the same as with your Stilton. I don’t know why you English always love to have a crust on everything.”

“I think I can explain that quite simply,” replied Drawbridge, “and, moreover, in terms of the sea which surrounds our island.”

“Please do so, Arthur,” said Caroline primly. She stared at Dormant’s hands, the one outspread upon the tablecloth, the other clenched about his glass. “*Honest Linds*,” she had said to him and, indeed, broad of palm with fingers short and stocky Dormant’s hands compelled thoughts of the knacker’s yards.

Arthur cleared his throat, a small and rasping sound as



muscles searched for absent mucus: "With marine sediment," he said, "many factors came into play . . . the depth of the water, the character and force of waves and currents, and of course also the supply of land-derived material."

"I love to think of Dormant in terms of land-derived material," said Isabel.

"I should say, offhand, that that was more a woman's rôle," said Arthur. "It will not surprise you to learn that a greater depth of sediment can accumulate on a steeply sloping shore than on a gentle one."

"Really," said Dormant. Nature he loved, indeed, but after nature, science.

"Wait," said Arthur. "I would not like any one among you to entertain false hopes. The supply of land-derived material falls off, as you can suppose, when we pass further out to sea."

"Don't be so Tennysonian, darling," said Isabel.

"The deposits of terrigenous origin thin out as we reach the six-fathom line, I repeat. They are then wedge-shaped, and their broad end will lie towards the land."

"Tell me about the Great Barrier Reef, Arthur," said Caroline.

"Yes," said Dormant, "tell her—but as for me, I'm going to do some work. When you marry they can wash the church steps with a bucket of my tears."

The night was very dark. The surface of the lawn was greasy. He wondered if she would follow him, but knew that she would not. While he was wondering this, he caught his foot in something, and lighting a match to discover the nature of the obstacle found it to be a croquet hoop.

"All right," he said to the hoop. "You've had your fun.

Now it's my turn. What you fellows forget is that when one sees you in any numbers, mallets can't be far away.

And, indeed, beneath a garden seat he found a mallet, with which he laid flat the hoop.

"Hullo, there," said Mr. Mendoza, emerging from behind a rhododendron bush.

"Don't frighten me like that, man. What the devil are you doing here, anyway?"

"This looks like a good mixed-farming property. Is the house Queen Adelaide?" said Mr. Mendoza defensively. He was, as Dormant could not help but observe, dressed for the countryside—that is to say, in Mr. Mendoza's terms—for Cape Cod, and not for Buckinghamshire. The wide mauve check of his tweeds was visible even in that almost total obscurity.

"If you want to paddle you'll find a herd of shorthorns somewhere down there in the bog," said Dormant.

"I was just taking a look around," said Mr. Mendoza. "I'm staying at the place you said. Maybe we could have a little talk tomorrow."

"Tomorrow would be wiser," said Dormant. "You don't seem to realise that this estate is patrolled by a pair of particularly black and vicious dogs."

"Dogs?" said Mr. Mendoza, with some alarm.

"Yes, dogs. I can't imagine why they haven't put their fangs in you already."

"In that case I'll be off," said Mr. Mendoza, and made as if to do so, but after a few strides he returned and said: "That was a very nice girl I saw through the window curtains, Mr. Dormant."

"Ah, so you play the Peeping Tom as well, do you?"

"Mr. Dormant: you don't seem to realise that it is my ambition to look after your welfare in every respect. You are a man who needs women, like the head needs a pillow.

Would you care for me to speak to this young lady on your behalf?"

"So long as I can be present I can imagine nothing more amusing. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Dormant."

So there it is . . . so there it is . . . the pain in the heart, the gripe in the bowels, the seat on the chair cushion, the hand on the book, and the eye reading the page . . . *flick-flick-flick* across the printed lines. This is Life, wonderful life, of which the years are three score and ten, plus three or four more added thanks to recent advances in medical knowledge: but the life in big cities will counteract that, and, indeed, it is well known that only Bulgarian peasants reach the centenary in any numbers.

*"The climate of Guzerat, in the winter months, is decidedly cold at night, and until the sun rises the air is fresh and invigorating. Locke had thirty miles on horseback before him, but he looked forward to his holiday with an intense enjoyment, thinking nothing of the distance, and still less of his troubles . . ."*

"Oh, God," said Dormant as he lit the spirit lamp and warmed his coffee, but he did not say this because the coffee was an American decaffeinated product designed to enable business men to sleep at night: he said it because he had suddenly seen his face in a mirror, and was as tired of that face as he was of himself.

One says also from time to time, as a pleasant paradox, that prisoners have, over free men, a most serious advantage: inasmuch as they do not have to earn their living, and may enjoy a certain degree of comfort and security. But the same illusion may be nourished, and a similar state of mind promoted by quite other means.

"I don't like the idea of you gentlemen going out after tiger on Christmas Day," said Mrs. Forsyth, shaking her comely head. "There is something very heathenish and uncanny about it."

*"Come now, madam," replied Locke. "This is no ordinary brute we are after but one which has been the death of numbers of people."*

*The lady permitted her admiring glance to rest for a moment upon the young man. Then her eyelids drooped. "Ah well," she said. "You are all against me, even Mr. Locke." Locke's companions, of course, laughed at her fears, doing their utmost to quiet her apprehensions, but to small purpose.*

The reading-lamp, bent above the desk, filled the room with oblong shadows. Dormant looked up. His gaze encountered that of the Man in Court Dress, who was standing by the window. Dormant felt his heart thump heavily.

"All right," he said, "who are you?"

"I am the man who wrote that book you're reading."

"You mean you are a ghost?" said Dormant. "Just a moment: it's some years since I last read that class of literature, but I understand that there are certain small tests which one is supposed to make."

He moved across the room and hit the man heavily upon the shoulder.

"I thought you people were never tangible," he said.

"We can be, and by special dispensation, too, when we come from Limbo."

"For how long?"

"That depends upon our mission. I have been authorised to appear before you every night, at your convenience, for three hours."

"By whom?"

"That, I'm afraid, I cannot tell you."

"Yes," said Dormant bitterly. "I've noticed that stories of the supernatural are always vague upon just such points." He looked at the man intently. "If you are tangible," he said, "then possibly you can have a drink as well?"

"I will join you with pleasure," said the man, "but it is useless for you to imagine that it will have any effect upon me."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Dormant. "Scotch whisky has changed a lot since your day." He poured out two drinks. "What is Heaven like?" he said.

"Well, we hear gossip, you know, but personally I've never been there."

"But what the devil have you been doing these last fifty years, then?"

"One moment, please," and the Man in Court Dress held up his hand. "I must ask you not to refer to the Management in those terms."

"Oh, just as you like," said Dormant. "Is somebody listening?"

"Yes, indeed," said the man, "and you'd be surprised to know the identity of the Clerk of the Court in charge of my case. One might say that he is one member of your profession who has really joined the Happy Few at last."

"My God," said Dormant. "Not Stendhal, surely?"

"I was never a great traveller on the Continent, myself," said the Man in Court Dress, "but Henri Beyle tells me that even where we are today has distinct advantages over Civita-Vecchia."

"You still haven't told me about your own particular function."

"Raking out the slack in the slow burners when the fires are dying," said the Man in Court Dress. "I assure you that fifty years with us is no more than the time it takes for the Master's eyelid to drop and rise again in a wicked wink!"

## Ten

"So what it comes to is this," said Dormant presently. "We can hear each other, but nobody else besides me can hear you?"

"That is correct," said the Ghost.

"A fine look-out it will be if they hear me talking to myself in my bedroom," grumbled Dormant. "People will think I am mad."

"Many people already think you are mad," said the Ghost of Lord Drawbridge.

"Maybe—but I had quite other ideas concerning those hours of the night when you say you are available."

"You must see the young lady in the afternoons. I made it a rule in my life, and I have made it a rule in my present condition, never to let women come before urgent business."

"Why don't you talk like your book?" said Dormant.

"My dear young man, does anyone talk like his book?"

"Stendhal did. Couldn't I see him. There are several questions I'd like to ask him about Julien Sorel."

"I'm afraid that the Clerk, in these cases, is obliged to remain invisible," replied the Ghost.

"What happens when we die?" said Dormant. "You died of old age and a bladder ailment, didn't you? What did it feel like?"

"I was looking at the eyes of my wife," said the Ghost. "I could hear the noise in my throat but I did not feel in any way personally responsible for it. I saw in the eyes of my wife, first fear, then pity . . . then finally, love. I died a very happy man."

"I don't doubt it," said Dormant, "but what is death *like*—that's what I want to know?"

"It depends a good deal on the case, you know. We have two Presidents with us, for example—Lincoln and Carnot. Both died suddenly, by assassination. It is the death of a man whose life has been cut short, which is the most painful."

"You haven't Julius Cæsar with you, by any chance?"

"I'm afraid not. I understand that he went to Heaven some centuries before I arrived."

"An unusual destination for a man with such pronounced private proclivities."

"Oh, with us, you know, there is very little occasion for that kind of thing. When we're not stoking, we're generally in study hours. The Master, as you may have heard, is very good at quoting scripture."

"Do you keep abreast of world events?" enquired Dormant.

"Oh, don't talk to me about that hydrogen bomb . . . you can't imagine how boring we find it. A single eruption of lava in the pit dwarfs it entirely."

"We cannot all be men like Gods," said Dormant. He finished his whisky, and proffered the bottle, but the Ghost declined another drink.

"What exactly did you come to see me about?" said Dormant.

"About my conscience. In that book, which you are reading, I did to nearly all concerned a very great wrong. How far have you read in it?" And, for the first time, the Ghost shifted foot.

"Ah—this is most interesting: so you don't know *everything*?"

"We know *about* everything, except about ourselves."

"I have reached the Indian Mutiny," said Dormant, "an occasion upon which you distinguished yourself, I understand, by directing that recalcitrant Hindoos should be fired,

alive, from cannon. Is it true that you were a Liberal candidate for this constituency before you inherited the title?"

"Perfectly true: I disliked Lord Shaftesbury. As for the Hindoos you mention I have met several of them since, and they bear no animosity toward me."

"You seem to meet a great many people. Do you mean to tell me that you can meet and exchange gossip with any person whom you knew, even casually, during your lifetime?"

"Well—such as live within my own section, certainly, and you would be surprised at their numbers. Only the other day for example, I was talking about Bentley's Commercial Code with Fouché. He was quite astonished at the progress which has been made in such matters."

And, taking up the manuscript Dormant read from it, at random, an extract from far ahead—from, indeed, the last fifty pages, and therefore from beyond the section which was missing:

"*Oh, pray do not go yet, Mrs. Locke,"* read Dormant aloud, "*pray do not go," said the handsome A.D.C. who had been waiting with the fascinating young woman incessantly, throughout the evening "We have all been ready to fly at each other's throats to get a dance with you . . ."*"

"I must say," observed Dormant, "we appear to have one thing in common. You employ almost as many inapposite adjectives as I do myself."

"Please do not read any more from that book," said the Ghost. "You have no idea what pain you are *causing* me."

"Why not?" replied Dormant, relentless. "I have no doubt that thousands skip the more stodgy pages in my books: why shouldn't I make a hop, skip and jump in yours? I was looking at a chapter before dinner tonight which I see is entitled '*The Green Eyed Monster*'. Giving titles to chapters has rather gone out of fashion since your day, but yours are



so beautiful that I think I shall try to revive it . . . 'Would she say Nay?' . . . 'Turned Adrift' . . . 'Not out of the Wood' . . . how do you manage to think of such things?"

"Stop," said the Ghost. "Can you not realise that it has been cruelly borne into me for fifty years of time, as measured by men, that I possessed no talent at all, not even the gift of hypocrisy?"

"What happened to those missing pages?" said Dormant.

"She destroyed them herself."

"I am quite sure you are lying."

"I am unable to lie in my present state. That is what, perhaps, is most terrible."

"How did she destroy the pages?"

"She put them in the kitchen fire—yes, with the maids watching—one afternoon, when I was out. She did not wish to destroy everything because she knew that to do that would be the end of me—I was already growing old, you must understand."

"I am still waiting to hear why she destroyed those particular pages."

"Because they were the most compromising—and also the most untrue."

"But surely you must have known, when you made that peculiar will, that the whole matter would arise again at the present time?"

"One makes wills when one is still in the world, when one must still reckon with the opinions of the living, and alarm or intimidate one's fellow-creatures. One does not calculate the eternal consequences." The Ghost paused. "Believe me, I am paying now," he said.

"That seems only fair," said Dormant. "Unlike myself, you don't seem to have paid very much in your lifetime."

"There you are quite wrong," said the Ghost. "You have read only the first part of my book, but you say that you have

glanced at the chapters ahead. Surely you must see that it is a drama of jealousy?"

"Yes," said Dormant, "I have glanced at what I have no doubt are some essential passages." He sifted the pages of manuscript and, having found the phrase which suited his text, quoted from it: *'He was fond, besotted. He loaded her with presents. When the time for their departure for India arrived, he gave her carte-blanche concerning her outfit, insisting that she should stint herself in nothing and, himself, purchased many expensive articles of luxury for her use, the which, from a desire not to be extravagant, she would fain have done without. There are many women—although she was not among their number—who, so far from loving those who are devotedly attached to them, seem to look down upon such affection as mere weakness, or, at all events, who conduct their lives as if such were the case.'*

"Yes," said Dormant. "God gave you certain powers, and, with time, no doubt, they grew to manly size. Yet what you do not realise—but which I realise very well from an unfortunate experience in my own life—is that this was the most dangerous of all God's gifts. The abuse of its equivalent, in women, may provide the basis of an endless narcissism; itself may cause endless torment to otherwise quite normal men." He paused; he looked at the Ghost. "What else did you love beside her body?" he said. "You had to dress it all up, hadn't you . . . yes, yes, the body and the *soul*, as well . . . You had to play at being pure and perfect. Women fall for those lines even nowadays. How much easier they must have fallen then."

"Very well," said the Ghost. "I loved, in her, my lost innocence—and it was well lost by then." He smiled. "That is not, of course, a phrase which I could have used in my lifetime, but I can use it now with equanimity."

"Of course," said Dormant. He stared at the Ghost, keenly. "And shall I tell you why?" he said. "It is because

you have now lost the possibility of employing those powers which you retained until far too late in life."

The Ghost stared at Dormant. "The essence of the tragedy is more frightful than you can possibly imagine," he said.

"Yes, I daresay," replied Dormant, "but let us not precipitate matters: I may want to write a book about all this one day. My books are badly enough weighted anyway without you quite gratuitously placing my culminating effect in the middle."

"*Books!*" said the Ghost, with contempt. "Does your entire life take place in books, in printed words and pages?"

"Very far from it," replied Dormant. "My life has been more connected with the various activities of the body; and with blood."

"My wife was my natural daughter," said the Ghost. "Now, perhaps, you will understand why I am here?"

"Repeat that, please."

"My wife was my natural daughter. I didn't know that at the time I married her, but I discovered it later. I said nothing to her. I continued to live with her—and she learnt the truth only in my last days, from the lawyer, who, like all lawyers, had in his keeping, many documents."

"In that case, I am sorry," said Dormant.

"Why are you sorry?"

"I am sorry to have adopted a flippant manner. This is not a subject for my flippant manner. Whose daughter was she, beside yours?"

"But—Gertrude's, of course."

"You seduced Gertrude upon her arrival in India?"

"No. I had seduced her—as you call it—in London, before my own departure."

"In that case I can only marvel at the hypocritical pathos with which you describe the sad scene as the ship sailed."

Dormant filled half his glass with whisky: he added soda. He did not offer his companion a drink. "But let us go on a bit," he said. "I notice from your book that Gertrude is seduced, not by you at all, but by a certain Captain Stewart, while upon her way to India."

"That is perfectly true. Stewart became her lover, at Aden, I believe."

"While she was already carrying your child? My dear Drawbridge, there seems to be something wrong in Heaven. It's a marvel to me that you were sent to Limbo, not to Hell."

"I meant well," said the Ghost.

"Everybody means well. One has to be very strong *not* to mean well."

"But I had no idea she was my child . . . can't you understand? Stewart was killed in the Mutiny. The mother and the baby returned to England. Within five years the mother herself died: the child, whose grandparents were also dead, was brought up by distant relatives. It was in those circumstances that I met her . . ."

"People seem really to have died like flies in Victorian times, as well as in their novels," said Dormant. He stroked the manuscript gently. "And so you have come back—or, rather, I suppose, been sent back to make reparation—is that it?"

"I have instructions to tell you the truth."

"How? By dictation? What do you take me for—some damned stenographer? And supposing I don't care for your truth—supposing that I find that my fiction, or your own, suits my purpose very much better?"

"Matters of that kind have already been elucidated in the place from which I come," said the Ghost of Lord Drawbridge. "I have not, of course, seen the report upon your character, but certain indiscretions have permitted

me to learn that you are described as an extremely sentimental man."

"Do you really mean to tell me that they are watching me from purgatory?" said Dormant.

"They are watching the whole lot of you."

"Well, I'm . . ." said Dormant: he had been about to say 'damned', but there seemed to be no advantage to be gained by damning himself—already only too probably damned—in advance.

"Your three hours are nearly up," he remarked, and pointed to the clock which stood upon the book-case.

"That is true," said the Ghost.

"Do you vanish gradually, or altogether, in one piece?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. One moment I am here: the next I am back *there* with a shovel in my hands. You can tell me tomorrow what it looks like, from your point of view. Last night, for example, when you refused to speak to me in the corridor, I had to hang around in a draughty passage for over two-and-a-half hours."

"Ah! So if I don't want to talk to you, there is nothing that you can do about it?"

"No."

"I will examine the rest of your book carefully tomorrow morning," said Dormant. "I promise that I will do what I can for you—but you, for your part, must try to get permission to appear at eleven o'clock tomorrow night, and not midnight. I really have better employment a little later in the night."

"Yes, I have heard about that," replied the Ghost. "Did you not think it peculiar that there should have been a fly on the wall here this afternoon—in England—and in December?"

"Are you telling me that those stories about the flies on the walls are true?" said Dormant.

"Satan," said the Ghost, "has many disguises."

"It may well be," said Dormant slowly, "that I may wish to strike a bargain with you. There is one person in the other world whom I wish to see perhaps even more than Stendhal. Is that at all possible?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied the Ghost. "I have no personal experience in such matters, you understand, but I could lay your request before the tribunal."

"Just a moment," said Dormant. He rose, and tapped the Ghost once more upon the shoulder. The shoulder was solid. "So it's true?" he said.

"Oh, yes," said the Ghost.

"Well . . . I don't want to be rude, but couldn't you vanish now? As you can see the time is five to three, and you have to vanish in five minutes anyway. I find all this extremely wearing, you know."

"You can make me vanish at any time you wish by making one simple gesture," said the Ghost. "You see—I did not need to tell you that, but if I have decided to do so, it is because I consider it best to place my destiny in your hands."

"What is that gesture?" said Dormant.

"Just click your thumb-nail gently against your teeth," replied the Ghost.

Dormant clicked his thumb-nail gently against his teeth. Where the tangible figure of the late Lord Drawbridge had stood, one-tenth of a second previously, there now remained but a small and disintegrating spiral of bluish smoke, as might arise from a cigarette forgotten in an ashtray, slowly devouring itself.

"Move over," he said. "Your knees are like those blunt instruments they kill people with"

"I didn't ask you to come here, you know," she said.

"I'm in trouble, Caroline," he said. "I'm in terrible trouble."

"Yes, they all say that. Don't talk so loud. I particularly don't want Isabel to hear."

"Why—would she be angry?"

"Well—you can't have helped noticing that she *thinks* you're the Black Death as far as women are concerned."

"I love you, Caroline."

"Love? That's a good one."

"You're so warm."

"Yes—and so are hot-water bottles. What's come over you, Dormant? I thought you were supposed to be a hard man."

"It's just that I'm soft for you."

"Hm! No one would think so. Why don't you go, and do some work?"

"I'm doing some work at this moment."

"Not that. Go and write your masterpiece. Didn't you tell me that you're supposed to deliver it by April?"

"I want to write a book about a girl with green eyes who wore pink pyjamas."

"Your friend Glenn is far too respectable to publish that kind of thing."

"But this girl gets married. Glenn likes girls who get married."

"Oh, yes? And then she had a little baby, I suppose—maybe even two . . . maybe even twins? That would give you a wonderful opportunity to write some harrowing chapters about childbirth."

"Don't be horrid to me, Caroline."

"Wait," she said. "I'm going to switch on the light. I want to have a look at you."

"There's nothing you can see," he said. "It's all inside."

She switched on the light, and she looked at him. "Are you really sincere?" she said.

"Yes, I am."

"All right," she said. "All right, I'll do it, though God knows where it's going to lead us."

"No, wait a moment," he said. "It's rather late in the day to ask this, but there's one thing you must tell me."

"You want to know if there's some other man, don't you?"

"That's right."

"Yes, there was. Now there won't be any more."

"Were you engaged?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, that's all right because he'd have had to get out of the way, do you understand . . . he'd have had to get out of the way."

## *Eleven*

"You worked pretty late last night, Adrian," said Isabel, at breakfast time.

"How do you know that?" said Dormant quickly: far too quickly.

"I looked out of my bedroom window and saw the light burning in the pavilion."

"Yes, I did quite a bit," he said. "I work best at night." He looked cautiously in the direction of Caroline, but Caroline, with head bent, was buttering a piece of toast. I am like some oafish boy who has thrown a stone into a pond, he thought—and then the boy looks and sees the ripples and realises that the pond is very beautiful; but the stone is still there somewhere, and the action can never be forgotten.

"I intend to work every night," he continued, and this



time Caroline looked up, and to his dear delight she smiled at him. c.

"You must be quite a changed man, Adrian," observed Isabel.

"I am indeed a changed man," said Dormant. "Where is Arthur?"

"Arthur is where Arthur should be—in the library."

"Then perhaps you'll pay my respects to him because this morning I intend to go out."

"Oh?" said Isabel. "Where?" Her expression became suddenly hard. So might a Daughter of the American Revolution have gazed at a portrait of Benedict Arnold; so might Saint Patrick have stared at the last snake in Ireland.

"Down Wanborough way," he said, "to the '*Coat of Arms*', if you must know."

"You haven't been bringing any of your shady friends here, have you?" said Isabel. She turned to Caroline. "Dormant is always followed about by a cloud of touts," she said. Then, to Dormant again: "I'll get dressed, and take you there."

He endeavoured to prevaricate, but when Isabel had set her mind upon discovery there was nothing to be done with her. She left the room with a last request to Caroline that certain letters should be typed before midday.

When she had gone, Dormant rose. He stood behind Caroline's chair and watched her nibbling toast.

"Has she had this business-woman manner long?" he said.

"Oh, don't worry. She only puts it on for you."

"What are the letters about, anyway?"

"Plumbing," said Caroline. "You know; it's a kind of mania with Americans—like sex with the French."

"With whom?" he said, and when she made no reply he touched the nape of her neck, and said: "Darling——" He said it twice.

"What?"

"Nothing. Just that. Darling. Anyway, whose girl are you?"

"I'm Daddy's girl."

"Ah, yes, Daddy! We must go into that some time. And what does Daddy do?"

"He's part-retired major and part-secretary of a golf club."

"What a lively lot of ironmongery they'll be able to hold over our heads at the wedding."

"Dormant, are you really serious? I bet you haven't even got the money for a ring."

"That's what you think. Of course I'm serious. I want to settle down. Listen, while we're waiting for her, let's settle down together in that service lift: it's fascinated me ever since I came here."

"It's too small."

"That's just what I like about it."

Isabel let in the clutch.

"I hope you don't mind the dogs in the back seat?" she said.

"Not at all," said Dormant. "But I did wash my neck this morning. Could you stop them licking it?"

"Tell me, Adrian—is it true, what Caroline says, that you've got a wife tucked away somewhere?"

"Quite true: every modern convenience. You almost got the word right, too."

They glided down a hill. Isabel shut off the engine. "It saves petrol," she said. "Oh, I do wish we weren't so *poor*. I haven't had a new fur coat for two years."

"Oh, God," said Dormant. "I'm sick of women whining about mink. I want a girl who likes musquash."

The village of Wanborough lies about five miles distant from the seat of Lord Drawbridge, and was not a place

normally visited by members of that family, who swept through it, bespattering rustics with mud or dust, according to the season, when on their way to the market town, or to London. A mild sensation was caused, therefore, when Isabel halted the ancient Rolls before the '*Coat of Arms*'.

"I'll come in with you, dear," said Isabel. "I want to buy some gin."

"Just as you like," replied Dormant. He wondered what line Mr. Mendoza would adopt with his compatriot: it might prove to be most amusing. Nevertheless, as a simple measure of prudence, he contrived by much clearing of his throat, to have her waylaid by the proprietor in the entrance hall. A woman of simple reactions, Isabel began immediately to haggle about the price of bottles. Dormant effected his escape and, with sure instinct, entered a door marked: '*Lounge*'.

Mr. Mendoza, seated at a desk by the window, through which latter he could obtain, if he should so choose, a view of a grocery store and the puddly, splashy street, was engaged upon what to Dormant's practised eye, appeared to present all the evidences of the splendours and miseries of literary composition. A full waste-paper basket stood beside Mr. Mendoza's left knee. There was much loose paper on the table, too, some of it inscribed in sprawling capital letters with that most sinister of all statements—CHAPTER ONE. Mr. Mendoza had also purchased no less than six exercise books. Some of these were of poor quality, containing inaccurate and blurred maps of England and Wales upon their inside covers, but others were more ornate, stiff-bound, important in appearance, purchased perhaps in bulk for distribution in the better class of grammar school.

Dormant averted his eyes from this distressing scene, in order to allow Mr. Mendoza, upon whose face he was

gratified to observe a faint blush, the time necessary to scoop up and make a little pile of his paraphernalia, Dormant's thoughts in that moment were not unlike those of some old lecher who, long past the prime of his virility, and with the titivating prospect of chastity ahead, finds that there is no escape from his former reputation, which has sufficed, of itself alone, to corrupt some unexciting virgin.

"Why, this is a surprise, Mr. Dormant," said Mr. Mendoza. His manner was hearty, even affectionate, but he was unable entirely to avert his eyes from the topmost notebook, upon the cover of which, undoubtedly, must be inscribed the title of the Work in Progress.

"I told you I would come," replied Dormant.

"It was damned decent of you to do so, sir," said Mr. Mendoza, in his Hampstead manner. He added, but this time in democratic, Brooklyn style: "You're a regular guy, Dormant."

"What exactly do you want to talk to me about?" said Dormant.

"This racing system, Mr. Dormant. As I said, it doesn't work in winter . . . over the sticks as you British call it, I believe."

"Yes," said Dormant. "My father never did like jumping. He used to say that there were too many gentlemen in the saddle for the sport to be honest."

"I think I have an alternative system which may keep us going until the flat season opens," said Mr. Mendoza.

"What is that?"

"National Hunt jockeys have not——" Mr. Mendoza paused. "How shall I put it?" he said, "—have not quite the same extensive experience of life as their flat racing colleagues."

"You mean they give more accurate information more easily?"

"That's about it, Mr. Dormant. Will you allow me to try my hand?"

"Do as you please," said Dormant. "You know my feelings about that money. If you lose the lot there won't be any kick from me." He examined Mr. Mendoza's pepper-and-salt tweed suit. This suit was well, even admirably tailored, but seemed somewhat out of place in such country surroundings. "You'd better buy some more suitable clothes, hadn't you?" he said, "if you're going to trail around the cowpat parts of Somerset and Berkshire?"

"Mr. Dormant," replied Mr. Mendoza with dignity. "I have clothes for every occasion. I was once an honorary member of the Westchester County Hunt, in New York State until the managing committee discovered my religion. It has always seemed to me so strange," he added, "that Jews should not be allowed to chase the fox."

"We are more tolerant in England," said Dormant. Then: "Is there anything else you want to talk to me about?"

"I was up having a look-see round the place you're staying at, Mr. Dormant, this morning. And I saw a very fine herd of cattle grazing."

"Exactly what d'you mean by that remark, Mr. Mendoza?"

"Britain needs meat, Mr. Dormant. If those folks ever get on your nerves, just let me know about it, will you?"

"Come, come, Mr. Mendoza: have you been in the Wild West, too?"

"I am a man of many ideas, Mr. Dormant, when I have a little capital behind me. It may interest you to know that I called upon the Peruvian Chargé d'Affaires the other day."

"Peruvian? Good God, whatever for?"

"Some of your father's investments, Mr. Dormant, were by no means so incautious as they may have seemed at the time. You own a railway station not far from Lima. Your father's money built the buffet."

"Well, I hope hot drinks are served, at least."

"Hot dividends may soon be served, Mr. Dormant."

"Is that so?" said Dormant, much impressed. Although Mr. Mendoza had seemed to him, from the start, to be a man of dangerously facile enthusiasms, Dormant shared that belief in the business acumen of Jews which is instinctive in Gentiles who have not encountered many Armenians.

It was at this moment that Isabel, who had only too probably been listening to the conversation from behind the door, chose to make her appearance.

Dormant effected the introductions: "You are both New Yorkers, I believe?" he said maliciously.

An interesting contest now ensued in which Isabel endeavoured to impress Mr. Mendoza with the fact that she was a fifth-generation American of exclusively Anglo-Saxon ancestry, and in which the latter—by no means abashed by the implication that he must, therefore, be himself a recent migrant from the ghetto in Warsaw, whose experience of America had been confined to a spell on Ellis Island—retorted that British peers were no novelty to him. He had met many of them, he declared, in circumstances so reduced that they had been obliged to become script-writers or prop-men in Hollywood.

"Come to that," he said, "one of Gloria Swanson's husbands was a Drawbridge, wasn't he . . . or was he a Moat?"

Dormant listened, fascinated. The small snobberies of the English, the little intricacies in their caste system were as nothing beside these great transpontine hatreds in which race stood against race, mixed breed against mixed breed, and in which the name of the good ship *Mayflower* and even—when the discussion became really heated—the terms of the *Declaration of Independence* itself, could sometimes be invoked to strike awe and dread into an opponent's heart.

"You must come out to dinner some time," said Isabel, treacherously. "Would tomorrow suit you?" It was obvious to Dormant that, finding herself unable to execute Mr. Mendoza summarily, and on the spot, she proposed to do so at greater leisure, and in her own home.

"I should enjoy that," said Mr. Mendoza. With his superior command of mime, he had conducted his side of the conversation, throughout, in a very creditable imitation of the Harvard accent. Isabel's voice, on the other hand, had become increasingly shrill, vibrant with outrage and a more than native twang.

"I always like to see an ancestral home," said Mr. Mendoza. "You must be proud to live in one." He winked at Dormant. "I built a few in my time . . . in cardboard, on the film set."

"What an *odious* little man!" exclaimed Isabel when, at last, they took their leave.

"Oh, do you think so? I find him rather soothing. His father knew Kafka, too."

"My father," said Isabel proudly, stamping hard upon the accelerator, "*my* father knew President Hoover."

Arthur Drawbridge was washing his hands in the cloak-room. First, he employed soap, then he stared for some moments at the short and rather prickly hairs upon his fingers. "*What hairy hands you have, Arthur,*" Isabel had said one day. "Come *here,*" and Arthur, always obedient to his wife in matters of personal hygiene had come, and Isabel had shaved away every single hair below his wrists, so that, when seen without a shirt, Arthur had looked rather like an ape which had dipped its paws in ipecacuanha.

But the hair had grown again, grown very quickly, and now Arthur was obliged to shave his hands almost every second week, and could no longer permit himself, because of

the attendant discomfort, one of his favourite gestures—that of denegation—which was to rub his hands together.

"If Isabel had been Pontius Pilate's wife," he thought, "the whole course of history might have changed." And Arthur chuckled, as, indeed, he often chuckled, and people invariably wondered *why*, because Arthur had never been known to say anything particularly amusing, aloud, for all to hear.

Perceiving Dormant, who stood uncertainly in the doorway, Arthur beckoned to him with a soapy hand. "Come in," he said, "do you want a wash?"

"Yes," said Dormant—it was Caroline who had told him that he needed one—and Arthur, who was now engaged upon another of his small duties, which was to remove from time to time the stains of nicotine from his fingers with pumice stone, made room for Dormant beside the wash-basin.

"Does the hair grow again on women's legs when they shave them?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Dormant.

Arthur repeated his question.

"I suppose so," said Dormant.

"But not really. Try quickly, I take it?"

Dormant considered the matter: "I believe quite a number of women have it removed once and for all with wax depilatories," he said.

"Wax?" said Arthur. "Now that's a good idea. Why didn't she tell me that? Wanted to keep it to herself, I suppose." He gazed at his hands, then at the piece of pumice stone. "You may think I bought this in a shop," he said, "but I didn't. I picked it up myself on the slopes of Vesuvius."

"Oh, did you?"

"Come into the library," said Arthur. "Lunch won't be



for half an hour yet. Shepherds pie," he added. "I asked for it myself. Nothing like English cooking, is there?"

"No," said Dormant. "Nothing."

When they were seated, Arthur brought out the sherry. He played with the piece of pumice stone, which he had brought with him from the cloakroom.

"I am very interested in volcanoes, too," he said. "Pumice, as I daresay you know, is nothing more than the solidified froth and scum from the surface of their lava."

"Is that why it floats?" said Dormant.

"It floats because its structure is cellular and contains gas and even air," said Arthur. He served the sherry. "I should very much like to visit the volcano at Krakatoa, in the Sumatra Sea," he said. "It lies exactly on the great line of weakness of the Old World."

"I must lie on that line, too," said Dormant. Then: "Well, why don't you go there? It's not so very far away from Easter Island?"

"I don't think Isabel would altogether care for such an extended trip," said Arthur. "Although she is very good about it, she finds my field work, I fear, somewhat distasteful. She feels, in fact, that men of science are seen at their best when confined to their studies. Have some more sherry?"

"No, thank you," said Dormant. He was a good boy, now.

"I wonder if our ancestors, the Neanderthal men, had studies?" said Arthur ruminatively.

"They certainly had a place of business," said Dormant. "If only to allow them to get away from their women. That's how business started."

"And money, too?" said Arthur.

"You bet!" said Dormant. "Don't you know why Cain slew Abel? There was gold in that garden. When God

threw them out, Eve took as much as she could carry away. Serpents can't laugh, because their laugh is a hiss. This one, the father of all cobras, was hissing with pleasure for hours. But God put a stop to all that. He created the first female serpent and eighty days later she was laying her eggs."

"Talking of ancestors," said Arthur. "Have you met one of mine recently?"

"What did you say?"

"I asked whether you had, as yet, encountered that very remarkable hypocrite, the second Earl of Drawbridge?"

"Yes," said Dormant. "I met him last night—and also, although we were not on speaking terms, the night before."

"I have seen him several times," said Arthur. "I have always taken a considerable interest in the supernatural, and was very grateful to obtain evidence of its existence."

"When did you first see him?"

"Shortly after Isabel began—for the reasons you know—to take an interest in his book."

"Does he speak?"

"I don't think he *can*," said Arthur. "I mean, I daresay he is authorised to do so to you, but with me he has evidently received instructions to imitate the behaviour of Banquo, though, God knows, I am hardly Macbeth."

"Has Isabel seen him, too?" said Dormant. "You might be Malcolm," he added.

"Certainly not," replied Lord Drawbridge sharply. "My great-uncle, with all his faults, would never commit the celestial solecism of making an appearance before other than his relatives by blood and—well, my dear fellow, excuse the crude term . . . their employees."

"Do you know what he wants?" said Dormant.

Arthur sighed. "Have some more sherry?" he said.

"No, thank you," said Dormant.

A short pause ensued. Arthur began to rub his hands together, but his knuckles were so prickly that he was obliged to desist. "Of course I know," he said. "Do you imagine that there has been a single scandal in my family in the course of two centuries which has not become the common property of us all in time."

"Then why didn't you write the eighty missing pages yourself?"

Arthur coughed: "My dear Dormant," he said, "in the light of what I have learnt by the very fact of my ancestor's appearance in ghostly form—I mean that there *does* exist a form of retributive justice after death—then I can assure you that I have plenty of work to do revising my memoirs . . . and, also, as far as I am able to do so . . . my life itself."

It was, of course, in a very different frame of mind from that in him pertaining, on the previous day that Dormant settled down to his compulsory reading after lunch.

Nor was he, now, alone. Upon the pretext that she would be most useful to him for the taking of notes and other small chores, he had obtained from Isabel, and for the entire afternoon, the loan of Caroline, who now sat with her typewriter in a corner of the room.

Caroline was painting her nails shocking pink. Sometimes she looked at him, and sometimes he looked at her. They did not speak much. Both were busy.

Dormant's task was no longer dull. It was fascinating for him, to watch the mind of the second Lord Drawbridge deployed, within the confines and limitations imposed by a Victorian novel, upon its work of self-justification. And now that Dormant possessed the essential information—that 'Gertrude's' child had been, in fact, fathered by 'Locke' himself, and that 'Locke', in later life, had married that child, had come to know the true facts of her parentage—and

knowing them—had concealed them because he loved the woman who had flowered from the child—now that Dormant knew all this, he could read the book with a much greater sympathy, though with a sympathy tinged only too frequently by a sense of embarrassment.

“Do you remember,” he said to Caroline after a while, “do you remember a book which came out about two years ago by . . . ?” and he mentioned the name of one of his contemporaries who had achieved a certain renown by his exploitation of basic Freudian facts, but who was, nonetheless, a very able writer.

“Yes, I remember. I read it,” said Caroline.

“Then you must surely know, because everyone does,” said Dormant, “that the book was quite true, and not more different, really, from the true facts of the case than the slight blurr and fuzz of a carbon copy when the pencil has not been sharpened recently.”

“Yes,” she said, “*‘Peer Fined’* and *‘Author Divorced’* have always been my favourite newspaper bylines.”

“That poor devil’s wife,” said Dormant, “after a protracted affair, involving hedging and ditching in barns and the back seats of cars backed into ploughed fields, left him for a member— if I remember rightly—of the Sussex Country Cricket Second Eleven.”

“Is that why he described the lover in the book as a professional footballer?” enquired Caroline dryly.

“I see you have no knowledge of our delightful but somewhat archaic libel laws,” said Dormant. “Glenn has to this day, in his safe—I have never actually seen that safe, but one day I fully intend to get the combination of it out of him by torture—a short manuscript of mine which deals with an even more famous gentleman of my profession. I have no doubt he will publish it when the Court Mourning is over. But the person I am talking about made the mistake of

publishing his book far too quickly. Moreover, he wrote while under the sway of emotions which, in a few years' time, he will indignantly repudiate . . ."

"Well, what about it?" she said. "He will write another book then, won't he?"

"The critics," said Dormant, ignoring this too dangerous interruption, "the critics, who are mostly novelists themselves, were delighted at the chance to leap on that book. . . . You must remember that he had been selling 25,000 almost every time, until then." He paused. "It was not a good book. It was all fingers and thumbs and undigested emotion, with a little timid hatred thrown in to make weight, but it was a genuine book and the man was trying to say something, through layers of self-reticence and the jangling nerves of insomniac nights—something, which he no doubt felt very deeply. The critics knew the facts of the case and, since they are not entirely insensitive, they must have known, also, that the man was doing his best."

"But if his best wasn't good enough, then surely the critics were perfectly right?" observed Caroline.

"Oh, no, they weren't," said Dormant. "They didn't say the book was bad. They chose, with the most sinister unanimity, to attack it as '*untrue to life*'. Such things, they maintained, just do not happen in Sussex . . . now I ask you: we all know Sussex; we also know . . ."

"Darling," said Caroline. "Don't get up on that old hobby-horse: the saddle's so dusty, and somebody has broken its tail."

"All right," said Dormant, reluctantly.

And he returned to the adventures of Locke:

*Gertrude thought she had never seen anyone so handsome before, while the owner of the handsome face pronounced Gertrude the loveliest creature he had ever set eyes upon. In the man's face, as Gertrude caught sight of it, there was that look of deep admiration*

*which no woman can mistake, and which called up a conscious blush to the young lady's countenance . . .*

"I am not," said Captain Stewart, advancing, "the dangerous personage whom you represent me to be," and he smiled, displaying a set of the whitest and most even teeth which Gertrude had ever seen . . .

"I hope I may have the honour of a dance," said this Adonis, with one of his most taking smiles. "With great pleasure," replied Gertrude, as she gave him her card to inscribe his name, before being led away by an undersized and vapid youth; the contrast between which small creature, upon whose arm she was obliged to rest, and Captain Stewart, made her admire the latter all the more. . . .

"Well, I suppose I can't complain," thought Dormant. "I was never particularly strong upon grammar myself."

He crossed the room and kissed Caroline, first of all on her forehead, and then in a small hollow of her shoulder which represented the ultimate point to which he could pull back her blouse without actually tearing it. She wriggled. How curious, he thought: all women have places, but every woman has different places. Then . . . how vulgar I am, he thought and then, since he was invariably inconsequential: "If I had met Celli in a tavern I would certainly have knifed him."

"Do you really love me?" said Caroline.

"Oh, yes, I do. I do love you."

The waltz is being played—la-la-la-di-da: the waltz is being played: "You are betrothed, I understand," said Captain Stewart. "Yes," said Gertrude, simply, "yes, I am betrothed."

"But, you've known so many women, Adrian. How can you imagine, even, that you're sincere at this stage of your life: that's what I can't make out."

"Imagine this, then, will you? In hotel bedrooms with thin walls, I have sometimes been obliged to listen to the game of love as performed by my immediate neighbours. Let me

tell you about a particular case: I had dined well, and gone up to my bedroom. All this happened in a hotel in Gap, in France. I had to finish a book quickly: the old slave-driver, Glenn, was after me. I was well on with the last chapter but one, and I was about to make a woman say—with reference to a projected visit by her lover, abroad—*‘Darling, don’t do that, please, for my sake.’* . . . When I heard, through the thin partition, these exact words—*my own*—which I held already in my pen—being spoken to her lover by a woman.”

“Did you put your ear against the wall?” asked Caroline.

“No, darling: I had no need to do so that time. Everything they said was coming out at me through the silence of a night in the *Dauphiné* . . .”

“And so what did you do?”

“I had no choice. I was obliged to listen. That woman should have been a lawyer: she’d have made a fortune as a prosecuting counsel. She began with leading questions of an intellectual order, but she continued with others more physical in nature . . . *‘Do you admire me?’* . . . *‘Do you consider me intelligent?’* . . . The man replied with an occasional grunt: there could be no doubt that he had endured all this many times before and was bracing himself for the more fearful ordeal which lay immediately ahead. Soon that ordeal began: her intelligence once established, the woman began the real work of the night . . . *‘Do you love my body?’* . . . *‘Irrmmp’* . . . *‘My body is better than Suzanne’s body, isn’t it?’* . . . *‘Irrmmp’* . . . *‘Well then, say you love it’* . . . *‘Irrmmp’* . . .”

“Oh, shut up, will you?” said Caroline suddenly. “You’ve no idea how much you annoy me.” And then, since he had, indeed, shut up, and made no reply, she added: “Well, tell me, at least, how it ended?”

“It ended like this,” said Dormant. “I got up from my table and I thumped as hard as I could on the wall, and I

shouted to the man: *'That's right: don't you give in, my boy; don't you say a word. I'm with you: don't you admit a damned thing, or you'll pay for it.'* "

"The plain fact of the matter is that you were jealous," said Caroline.

"That's what you think! I saw the woman at breakfast next morning: she must have weighed all of twelve stone: it's true that the man weighed fourteen, but in that kind of matter, what's the advantage of a few pounds in weight?" He touched Caroline's fingers lightly, with his own. "But the deeper irony was still to come," he said. "After breakfast, I was summoned by the hotel management and severely reprimanded for making a noise in my room, in the night. . . ."

And he resumed his study of the devastation caused in Gertrude's heart by Captain Stewart.

## Twelve

DINNER, that evening, passed off most pleasantly. It may well be, indeed, a culinary solecism to curry a fish as exquisite as Dover sole, to break up, to pound, and to disintegrate with all-pervasive Vceeraswamy powder, a flesh at once so firm, so tender, but the result—if the dish is properly prepared—is alluring to the palate, stimulating to the juices of the stomach, and salutary, by its scouring action, when transferred to the larger of the two human intestines.

After dinner, they played bridge. Dormant's father had been an expert at this game, if game it may be called, and in Dormant's youth, after his mother had died, the house had been full of an afternoon with green baize tables with chattering or mutinously silent women, and with cheese straws marking the points of the compass around small



silver bowls. Dormant had been taught the game, but had not, it seemed—although his father had shown tolerance in this matter, as in so many others—possessed sufficient pliancy of mind to memorise the many, and most intricate rules.

He played, with Caroline as partner, lost seventeen shillings and sixpence, caused her to lose considerably more, and was constantly being accused, both vocally and with the sharp point of Isabel's toe upon his shin, of the act of revocation.

"Darling," he said to Caroline afterwards as he picked up and munched an article which he discovered by its taste—and with a sentiment of atavistic reverence—to be an authentic cheese straw: "Darling," he said, having got her into a corner beside a huge and becrusted porphyry vase. "Darling, are we nicer than them all, or is it just a great illusion?"

"I was thinking about that this morning," said Caroline, "and I rather think I must be. But not you, though. I think you must be the stone from which they all crawl out from under!"

"That's all right," said Dormant. "I can see now that I shall never be taken seriously: though possibly you might do so if you knew that I have at least one extremely interesting friend."

He watched Arthur and Isabel, who were conversing quietly in another corner of the room. Men, thought Dormant, have their doubts carried around for them by their wives.

"What you are thinking?" said Caroline.

He told her, then added: "D'you know, sentimentalism is quite a modern ailment. You won't find any in Shakespeare, nor in Molière: certainly not in Aristophanes. There, you'll only see men in love or hate. Sentimentalism is a sign of social lethargy."

"Darling," she said, "Are you holding forth?"

"Yes," he said, "that's the way it sometimes takes me. Oh, how I wish that I knew more . . . how I wish that I knew more. . . ."

It was now eleven o'clock.

Dormant lay back in his chair. He pulled the manuscript towards him. He began to read about the emotional troubles of the lovely Gertrude who, in one of the most brilliant of London Seasons since the Fall of Sebastopol, had met—and waltzed—only too frequently with the fascinating Captain Stewart, home upon extended furlough:

*"I love him," she thought, 'I love him.' Yes, but must she then lose the affection which her betrothed offered her without stint, must she make the man to whom she knew she was dearer than life itself miserable, perhaps broken-hearted? Her parents, too—how would they view her conduct, if she jilted Locke? Gertrude knew full well that such behaviour on her part would anger them exceedingly. Her father, with his fine sense of honour, would consider himself disgraced. 'Had he not often told her that it were better for a woman to die than to become a light of love. . . ?*

At this point it occurred to Dormant that there was only one way of disentangling the facts from this mass of verbiage, and this was to take a large sheet of paper, divide it into two columns by a vertical line, and put down on one side the events as described in the book, and on the other side the events as they had actually occurred by the Ghost's admissions, and in Life.

And so that is what he did, and this is the result:

### THE TRUE FACTS

Gertrude has been seduced by Locke before the departure of the latter for India. There seems to be no doubt, taking into account the virulence with which the character is

portrayed, that a Captain Stewart did in fact exist, and did marry Gertrude. Did Gertrude, then, allow herself to be seduced a second time, by Stewart, and did the latter assume that the daughter born to her was of his fabrication?

How much did Locke know concerning these events at the time of their occurrence?

### THE BOOK

Gertrude sails for India. Her heart is torn between two loves, as she watches the beloved shoreline of her country slip away. '*Where is Captain Stewart?*' she asks herself. Had he ever wasted a thought upon her since that last waltz, at the close of which he had laid his right hand gently, but with insistence, athwart her bodice?

In point of fact, Stewart is below decks, drinking rum-and-water with a Major of the 14th Foot. He has bribed the Agents of the Company to provide him with a passage in this ship, aboard which he knows that his intended victim must embark.

'*Twelve weeks!*' . . . '*Twelve weeks alone together,*' the villain is thinking as he runs a well-manicured index finger through the luxuriance of his moustache.

Presently he appears upon deck, and placing himself behind the heaving shoulders of the distracted girl says: '*Good heavens! Miss Clavering, you here! This is indeed a delightful surprise.*'

And he holds out his hand, in which she can do no otherwise than to place her own.

'*Little did I think when I left England,*' adds he, '*that we were to be fellow-passengers. Pray, where are you bound for . . . and to whom are you going?*'

With a deep blush which she is unable to restrain, Gertrude informs him that she was 'going to friends in Bombay.'

This is the first major lie of her life.

The ice having been thus so thoroughly broken, Stewart took good care to improve his opportunities, and until the breakfast-bell rang, continued to do his utmost to amuse Gertrude, whose brightening eyes and heightened colour soon assured him that he had been successful. The wind freshening, there was now considerably more motion than previously, and this being the case, Stewart advised Gertrude not to venture into the saloon but to have the scrambled eggs for which she expressed a preference, brought to her, on deck, by himself. . . .

### THE TRUE FACTS

One must assume, wrote Dormant, that Locke did not know at the time that his felonious behaviour had caused Gertrude to become pregnant, and yet, since rather more than three months had elapsed since the doing of that deed, it seems most improbable that the young lady should have remained unaware of her condition; even if the corsets then in vogue prevented others from observing it.

On a superficial view of the matter there was nothing whatever to prevent Gertrude marrying Locke immediately upon her arrival in India: indeed, this was the ostensible reason for her trip. The subsequent scandal caused by a too premature birth of their first child could have been glazed over by her visiting what were known, even in those days in India, as *'The Hills'*.

That Gertrude deceived Stewart is certain . . . that she now disliked Locke intensely is almost as certain. Stewart was no doubt, in actual fact, a notorious philanderer, and it may have seemed to Gertrude a most suitable revenge to capture the heart of this apparently heartless man.

When one considers the affair one's sympathies go, it seems to me, instinctively toward Gertrude. Her life had

been secluded; Locke, the first man to demand her hand in marriage. Locke was personable. 'He appeared to possess some hopes of future wealth. We do not know—although I will certainly ask the Ghost tonight—in exactly what circumstances he seduced her, but no matter how it happened—whether with rumpled pillows or with crumpled cushions on a divan, it was a most odious action on his part.

Writing forty years later, and in the unctuous manner peculiar to him, Locke leaves little doubt of the hatred in which he held his successor. From interior facts within the book it would seem that Stewart, in his turn, won Gertrude's heart either somewhere in the Red Sea, or while the ship was berthed and coaling at Aden.

But it does not seem to me at all possible for Stewart to have—oh dear, that frightful word again—seduced Gertrude as Locke implies, on board ship. After her first appalling experience the unfortunate girl would surely be most unlikely to yield, and to another man, a second time?

Was Stewart's, then, an altogether and more noble character than the reader, influenced by Locke, has hitherto tended to image?

After all, he *did* marry her, and not many years afterwards perished—as even Locke admits—bravely, in the Indian Mutiny.

But let Locke speak . . . let him describe events of which he could have had no personal knowledge whatever.

Could hypocrisy be carried further?

But apparently it can be carried further . . . apparently no writer, professional or amateur, is safe from that particular accusation? Well, indeed, will I always remember having carried the baggage, humped it up the stairs in Athens on the night that *we* parted: and how when I had hung the last summer *tailleur* on the last coat-hanger; and she turned to me and said:

"It was nice of you to do that. It's a nice flat, too. Would you like some coffee?"

"I brought some with me," I replied, "wrapped up in an envelope from the Inland Revenue."

After thirty-five minutes, she served the coffee.

"I suppose I shall be in none of your books from now on?" she said.

"What's that you said?"

She repeated what she had said.

"You were never in any of my books except that single one which you persuaded me to write by your fine display of lies."

"That isn't true," she said. She mentioned two other books.

"Those were about all the girls," I said, "all the ones who resemble you: and they're so very, very many."

## THE BOOK

We are at a . . . Deck tennis and other attendant horrors of the modern cruise have not yet been invented, but the more sedentary charms of backgammon may serve to while away the weary hours.

'Surely,' writes Locke, 'no more favourable opportunity can be given a man of carrying on a flirtation with a young woman than by means of this devilish game? The players are in close proximity, the game itself requires little thought, and allows of constant conversation, while the rattling of the dice is provocative of much fun and badinage. A man must be a fool, indeed, if he cannot improve his position in a girl's estimation during an hour or two spent at this pastime!

'Stewart plays his cards—or, perhaps dice would be more accurate—warily, and with great finesse. He does not yet speak of love. Like the skilful mining engineer, who works his way beneath the ground, with every endeavour to keep his approach to the citadel he is attacking out of the

observation of those who defend it, and who does not lay the fatal charge, till he is certain by its position that when the explosion takes place, the object of his attack will be laid in ruin. Stewart had, up to this time been at great pains to hide from Gertrude his real objective, lest the contemplation of her imminent treachery should arouse in her uncontrollable feelings of remorse. . . .’

‘Yet, one evening, so great by now is their intimacy that he judges the fruit ripe for the picking: “Miss Clavering,” he murmurs, possessing himself of her delicate wrist: “I can no longer conceal from you my secret—I love you devotedly, ardently. My future is in your hands. I have not always been a good man. If you cast me off, despair will cause me to become what I was, alas, before I first set eyes on you. . . .”’

Stewart’s declaration occupies two and a half close-written pages. It leaves Gertrude trembling violently ‘*as if shaken by an ague.*’

‘A very little more,’ thinks Stewart, ‘and she is mine,’ and he begins to talk to her of the hell on earth which awaits the woman who abandons her true love for a man with whom she can expect no happiness.

That night Gertrude tosses sleeplessly in her bunk. She loves Stewart. She cannot envisage condemning him to a life of profligacy by an insincere refusal on her part. She is also much preoccupied with theological questions. True, her parents, her friends, will blame her for this action: but what then? To marry Locke now, to swear falsely before God, would be a sin of so deep a dye that she could not hope for forgiveness, if guilty of it. Ought she not therefore, to brave the anger of her earthly parents, and disregard the world’s censure, sooner than offend her Celestial Father?

But as things turn out, there is no need to put all Heaven in a rage for, next morning, on deck, and in answer to his urgent question Stewart hears the whispered:

‘Yes.’

His face flushed with a gratified look of triumph he delays only so long as it is necessary to allow the Major of the 14th Foot to pass out of sight, before implanting a burning kiss upon Gertrude’s neck.

It is arranged between them that they shall leave this ship at Aden and take passage to India in another—where they will, of course, be married immediately.

### THE TRUE FACTS

In the next chapter of the manuscript, Locke, boarding the ship upon her arrival at Bombay, is handed the letter which Gertrude had left for him, in charge of the Captain. He reads it, falls in a swoon, and is finally revived by a glass of strong brandy.

‘Bear up, my boy,’ says the ship’s Captain, whose painful duty it has been to acquaint Locke with his misfortune. ‘There are as many good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,’ to which remark he adds several others, more nautical in texture, none of which can be construed as complimentary to Miss Clavering.

Yes, thought Dormant, all this is very beautiful, but the word ‘fish’ is introduced at the right moment for the more I look at the evidence, the more fishy it appears. The whole thing reads, indeed, like a beautiful reconstruction. And he pushed the manuscript aside, and had begun to doodle with a pencil on a sheet of paper when something caused him to look up.

The Ghost of Lord Drawbridge, still attired in Court Dress, stood in a corner of the room. The clock showed that the hour was midnight.

“Well, at least you are punctual,” said Dormant. “Were you reading my thoughts?”



"I was," replied the Ghost.

"Then will you kindly tell me exactly what *did* happen because you are driving me mad with your mixture of fact and fancy."

"I should like a little whisky first," said the Ghost. "I've had a very tiring day and I rather enjoyed that little pick-me-up last night."

Dormant gave him a whisky-and-soda. The Ghost sat down in an arm-chair. He sipped his drink:

"Have you never taken certain small liberties with the truth in your own books?" he enquired.

"That's quite another matter," answered Dormant sharply. "I transpose: you distort."

"A mere question of terminology," said the Ghost. He leant forward and tapped Dormant's knee. "*What about Sonia?*" he said. "We have one or two of your books in our library. I assure you they are very popular with those members of our community who enjoy a hearty laugh."

"Does Stendhal read them?" asked Dormant.

The Ghost shook his head: "Henri Beyle only reads the Bible now," he said. "He's trying to win his ticket to the Other Place . . . not I assure you for any reasons of piety, but because he finds it intolerable that Balzac got there before him."

"We must talk about Stendhal another time," said Dormant, regretfully. "What I want to know now is whether you knew that Gertrude was with child by you?"

"No, I swear to you that I did not."

"And she did in fact run away with, and marry, this other man?"

"She did."

"Why?"

"Why do you think? Because she loved him, of course."

"Yet this other man—he must surely have been aware of her condition?"

"Certainly, he was aware of it."

Dormant stood up: "Then don't you think it disgraceful the way you attack and calumniate him in your book?" he said.

"No more disgraceful than one or two things which I could point out in yours," replied the Ghost smoothly. "My dear young man, you seem to forget that you may find yourself in my position one day."

"I'll take a chance on that," said Dormant. "Tell me . . . was she happy with this other man?"

"Very happy . . . too happy for my peace of mind."

"Ah! So you were jealous."

"That is a word for milksops and little men. I was in torment, and for years."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Dormant. "Now, tell me—was he really killed in the Mutiny?"

"He was."

"A little further on, you have a charming scene in which 'Locke', having pacified most of Lower Bengal by himself, delivers a distracted—and as it turns out—dying lady from the clutches of a hundred maddened sepoys. How much of that is true?"

"As far as my own part in the affair is concerned—none of it."

"We shall make a novelist of you yet," said Dormant. "So Gertrude was, in fact, in danger, and *did* die? Who saved her?"

"A friend of mine. He told me of it months later. He also saved her child and was responsible for sending it to England."

"Where exactly did *you* yourself spend the months of the Mutiny, then?"

"In a club-house in Bombay."

"It isn't a novelist you should be: it's a politician," said Dormant. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Yes, eternally, and I find it extremely fatiguing! You people who are still alive can have no idea of the effect of those flames upon the human skin."

"At this point in your manuscript," said Dormant, "we come to three interminable chapters, mostly concerned, so far as I can see, with pig-sticking and fox-hunting. Will you allow me to say that the construction of your book is appalling?"

"By all means," replied the Ghost, "though it is hardly a reproach which I expected from you."

Dormant examined the Ghost closely: "You seem very sure of yourself tonight," he said. "Has something happened?"

"Yes, I have received a small promotion. I no longer rake out the slack: from tomorrow I shovel in the coal."

"I congratulate you, but we are not here to deal with jobbery and place-seeking in the other world, but with the facts of your life before death." Dormant stuck out an accusing finger. "How is it," he said, "how is it that 'Locke', a man enjoying excellent health, appears to have reached the age of forty-five without having had a single love affair?"

"What do you mean, sir?" replied the Ghost indignantly. "Of course I had love affairs. I may even say that I had many."

"Then why don't you refer to them?"

"Because, with all my faults, I have somewhat more delicacy than you, sir."

"Somewhat more humbug, you mean. Who were your victims?"

"They were mostly married ladies," replied the Ghost

with insufferable complacency as he stroked his fine white moustache.

"Very well," said Dormant. "We will leave the ladies until another time for I see that, after the Mutiny, we come almost immediately to the eighty missing pages." He drew the manuscript towards him. "I also notice that the chapter is entitled '*I Home Again*'. How absolutely delightful, and it begins in the approved style, too." Dormant read from the book in an unctuous voice: *'Fourteen years have elapsed, fourteen long years fraught with great change among all the personages of our story. Somewhere in England—in a country vicarage to be precise—a little girl called Susan, who is no other than the daughter of Gertrude and Captain Stewart and has grown into a remarkably fine and handsome young woman. . . .'*

"Stop! I beg you to stop," said the Ghost in a strangled voice.

"I couldn't go on much longer, anyway," said Dormant, "because ten pages later it stops all by itself. Why did your wife destroy that particular section of the book?"

"Because they contained the chapters which referred to our courtship and marriage, of course."

Dormant looked at him incredulously: "And yet she left intact, toward the end, much longer chapters describing your insane jealousy of her in India, your attempts to get rid of her and the follies you encouraged her to commit?"

"Why not?" replied the Ghost calmly. "There was much truth in those chapters. I even somewhat exaggerated my unpleasantness—as indeed my wife was generous enough to tell me at the time."

"Wait a moment," said Dormant. "Let's get this straight. Your motive for making these personal appearances before me is that I should know the truth, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Very well. At present I *do* know the truth. The woman

whom you married was, in point of fact, your daughter, and at some stage in your relationship you discovered that fact, and concealed it."

"No," said the Ghost. "The case is far more grave than you seem to imagine," and he looked at Dormant in such a way that even the latter felt an impulsion of pity toward him. "*I knew all the time,*" he said.

"What's that?" said Dormant, appalled. "So you concealed the truth from me."

"If you knew what I'm suffering . . . if you knew what I'm suffering . . . even now . . . even here."

"Never mind about that. Get on with your story."

The Ghost spoke slowly, each word appearing to cost him an intense effort. "I told you," he said, "that the child was sent home to England by a friend of mine. What I omitted to add was that in the absence of any close relatives—for both the grandparents were by that time dead—I arranged to become her guardian."

"But this is horrible," said Dormant. "Are you telling me that for something like fifteen years you were meditating and planning a crime as vile as that?"

"Not for fifteen," replied the Ghost, "but for the last four or five of them, certainly. Indeed, I may say that I came to regard it as quite natural, even inevitable."

"I don't understand," said Dormant. "I can understand incest in primitive peasant communities where women are, for some reason, scarce. I can even understand it between brothers and sisters who have been brought up separately. But father and daughter . . . and premeditated, too . . . no, no, that's beyond my comprehension. You defeat me utterly, I'm afraid."

"And yet it is quite simple," said the Ghost. "I loved the mother, you see . . . I loved Gertrude, though how deeply and passionately, I came to realise only when it was already

too late. And I did her that great wrong, which you know, in London. And her own love for me died because of it . . .” He hesitated.

“Go on,” said Dormant.

“She would have jilted me, anyway. She was put aboard the ship for India by her parents almost by force: in those days girls had no choice in such matters but to obey. For a long time I believed that she had eloped with the man I have called ‘Stewart’ merely as a means of escaping from me: but later I could no longer ignore the evidence.”

“What evidence?”

“India is a huge country, but the British community is small. Everybody knows everybody else, or at least something about them. The Stewarts were known as the most attached, the most devoted couple in the entire British *Raj*. People even made jokes about them: *in my presence they made jokes . . .* can you understand?”

“Yes,” said Dormant.

“I had suffered from the first,” said the Ghost, “but when I realised how much they meant to each other I began to endure torments, which could bear comparison with those which I am obliged to endure now, in my eternal state.” He paused and stared at Dormant, and his face was at once malevolent and tragic. “And all because of what?” he said. “Because of half an hour of brutish and animal behaviour in a boudoir, after drinking too much champagne.”

“Yes, that’s all very well,” replied Dormant. “I am the last person who is able to reproach you for that particular misdemeanour and I can well understand your feelings when you realised you had lost her, but your marriage is another matter. It seems to me to speak very well for Heavenly tolerance that you are in no worse a place than Limbo.”

The Ghost buried his head in his hands. “I tried,” he said, “I fought against it. I swear I tried.”

"Nonsense," said Dormant. "That sort of play-acting may go down very well with the Holy Ghost who is, I believe, the most sentimental member of the Trinity, but it cuts no ice with me. '*Fought against it*,' indeed," he mimicked the Ghost's voice. "On the contrary, I believe you lived with the idea for years, nursing it, imagining the day when it would become a reality—for, of course, *it was your revenge, wasn't it?*"

"It was," said the Ghost.

"Because if you couldn't have the mother you could have the child?" pursued Dormant relentlessly. "Oh, I can well believe that the incestuous aspect of it hardly disturbed you at all. The child for you was Gertrude, a second Gertrude whom you wouldn't lose this time. Your paternity seemed a mere accident, though I daresay you took care to check one or two dates and so make sure that you *were* the father."

"Yes, I did."

"And nobody *knew*, did they—nobody except yourself and Gertrude, and her husband, Stewart: and those last two were dead. Nobody could accuse you of anything. How happy you must have felt as you opened the Vicarage Gate; the great man from India come to see, and woo, his ward."

"Must we go into that?" said the Ghost.

"No," said Dormant. "I find it all quite as distasteful as you must do yourself, but there's just one question I want to ask, and I think it's the most interesting of all."

The Ghost looked at him in mute enquiry.

"Who did she look like?" said Dormant.

The Ghost was silent for some moments before replying. Then: "She resembled her mother at first," he said heavily, "but later, when our first children had been born, she began to resemble me."

"How did she discover the true state of affairs?" asked Dormant.

"I would like some more whisky, please," said the Ghost. Dormant gave him some whisky, added soda.

The Ghost was silent for some moments. Then: "She had always known of my affection for her mother," he said. "That had been the pretext for my interest in herself when left an orphan. From her earliest youth she had grown up with the idea that I had been a close friend of her mother's family and perhaps—who knows—an unsuccessful suitor for Gertrude's hand. I believe that a doubt had been growing in her mind for many years. One day that doubt became a certainty." At this point the Ghost paused, and stared intently at Dormant. "If I may give you a piece of advice," he continued, "it is never to preserve letters of a sentimental nature. If a man has any kind of varied life at all, they are bound to accumulate. I do not know what the railway charges are now, but in my day they were already excessive and, at each change of residence, I was involved in unnecessary expense for the transport of correspondence and gee-gaws to which I had long ceased to give a thought. And as things turned out I became involved also in the loss of the only happiness which I ever enjoyed."

"I'll remember your advice," said Dormant.

The Ghost nodded: "One day," he said, "with one of those fits of energy which came to her often in middle age, she was clearing out a box-room with the help of the maids, and at the bottom of an old picnic-basket she came upon a bundle of letters which Gertrude had written to me at the time of my first departure for India. You can understand what that meant?"

"Were there details . . . I mean, reproaches, accusations and so on?"

"No, but there was quite sufficient for her to learn the truth."

"So what did she do?"



"She came to me, and I *told* her the truth."

Dormant endeavoured to imagine the agony of mind of this unknown woman. "Do you mean to tell me that she didn't leave you?" he said incredulously.

The Ghost hesitated, and Dormant was gratified to observe that his concern seemed to be now, less to defend his own actions, then to explain and justify those of his wife.

"We had already been married twenty-four years when that occurred," he said. "Then, too, you must remember that she had never known me in the rôle of a father, but only in those—first of a guardian, whom she seldom saw, and secondly, and for so long, as a husband. The facts were there, terrible and inescapable, but women have surprising powers of obnubilation in such matters. The true state of affairs must have seemed to her fabulous, beyond the domain of her appreciation." He paused again, touched his moustache. "You must also bear in mind the opinion of the world at large," he continued. "Divorce was unthinkable in those days: even separation very rare. Our children were grown men and women . . . and, lastly, God help her, she loved me."

A question occurred to Dormant, but he did not ask it.

There was no need: the Ghost answered that question for him: "She was already past the age of child-bearing," he said. "I myself was sixty-seven. You see me in this room as I was at seventy-three at the time of my death."

"So you went on together until the end?" said Dormant.

"Yes, until the very end."

"And shortly afterwards you began to write this book?"

"Yes."

"But why . . . *why*? What possible consolation can it have been to you to write a hundred thousand words of lies?"

"You cannot understand?" There was a note of genuine surprise and a hint of contempt in the Ghost's voice. "I

should have thought that as a writer yourself . . ." He broke off and gazed at Dormant piteously. "What I wrote," he said, "I wrote in all sincerity—for it represented *my* life as I would have wished that it had been."

The statement—was it in fact a statement, or something more: an accusation?—seemed to hang in the smoky air. The two men; the one material, the other incorporeal and near the hour of his departure, faced each other.

"Does it ease your burden that I should know this?" said Dormant.

"Very considerably."

"But what is it that you wish me to do?"

"You must rewrite the manuscript in the light of what you have learnt."

"Are you mad? Don't you realise that it would be an entirely different book?"

"Then write it as a different book . . . but for yourself."

Dormant reflected: "Yes," he said, "I might envisage that, but I should have to change the background. I've never been in India: the only place I know is Greece."

And he had a sudden impulse to laugh as he thought of Glenn's face when confronted with a massive Victorian novel, ostensibly from his pen.

"But all that is mere speculation," he continued. "The point at the moment is that you made a ridiculous will and that unless this book appears next year, your descendants stand to lose a great deal of money. You are now comfortably off in the next world but they are struggling to pay their surtax in this one."

"I cannot understand why I ever concocted such a piece of foolishness," said the Ghost contritely. "In my present state it seems to be absolutely incomprehensible."

"Yes, I daresay it does . . . and it may interest you to know that the present Lord Drawbridge knows the truth."

"Did he say so?" enquired the Ghost with interest.

"Yes."

"Then he is lying. He may guess it. My wife, I understand, spoke when in delirium and on her death-bed, but nothing can be known for certain."

"That doesn't alter the fact that I have somehow or other to supply those eighty missing pages, and that you haven't helped matters by telling me that everything I put down will be nonsense."

"Write them," said the Ghost. "Write them as a simple story of love and courtship. You would not be so very distant from the truth."

"Thank you very much," said Dormant sarcastically: "I already have enough trouble with you. I don't want your wife appearing before me, pointing an accusing finger."

The Ghost pondered this question: "I will ask the Management and we will see what they suggest," he said.

"I think you'd better," said Dormant. "Otherwise the only alternative I can suggest is that you make a few personal appearances before the firm of solicitors who deal with your estate. You might also do worse than visit my publisher and explain just why I'm not getting on with my own novel. Don't worry . . . he won't ask you to sign anything: he only likes the memoirs of Labour Peers."

He pointed to the clock, which said five minutes to three.

"You'd best be getting ready, hadn't you?" he said.

"I am perfectly ready," replied the Ghost with equanimity.

"Would you like us now to talk of your own affairs?"

"What affairs?"

"You want very much to see your father, do you not?"

"Yes," said Dormant.

"I have discussed that question with my furnace leader. Permission will be granted. You will see your father tomorrow night as soon as I have left. I would have

preferred to be present, but we have a rule connected, I understand, with the degree of strain which may be safely imposed upon the human nervous systems. This rule enjoins us never to appear in pairs."

"How fortunate for my father," observed Dormant.

"Was there not something else you wished to know?" enquired the Ghost.

"I don't think so."

"Some question that you desired me to put to Stendhal?"

"Stendhal?" With a feeling of shame Dormant realised that he had almost forgotten Henri Beyle: "Stendhal? Ah, yes . . . yes . . . ask the old rascal, will you, why, when Julien Sorel was in the prison cell and facing death, and Mathilde de La Mole was visiting him . . . why the devil he didn't let his hero have good measure and allow him to strangle her. That's what I'd have done."

"I will ask him," said the Ghost.

"Thank you," said Dormant. "And now go away, will you. I have had quite enough for one evening."

And he clicked his thumb-nail against his teeth.

And a spiral of blue smoke arose.

## *Thirteen*

"WHAT on earth is all that noise?" said Dormant grumpily.

"It's Arthur's pigs," said Caroline. "They always wake up in the middle of the night and toddle over to the trough to have a snack."

She sat up in bed, and switched on the light.

"You look lovely like that," he said. "You look like Arethusa. If I half-close my eyes I can imagine that those sheets are pure sea foam."

"Dormant, since you won't go to sleep, you might at least tell me a story."

"I don't know any stories."

"Nonsense. What are writers for if they can't entertain their women with an impromptu tale? Think of Hans Andersen."

"That's what I'm doing: he was a lifelong bachelor."

"Go on!" she said, and pinched him.

"All right. There was once a little girl who had a little curl . . ."

"I don't want to hear *anything* which needs a physical demonstration," said Caroline, and she removed his hand.

"Well, how about this?" said Dormant: it was the sight of her shoulders, arched as she listened, that gave him the idea. He began to tell her about a girl who grew wings. The girl's dressmaker was the first to notice the phenomenon, and called her attention to it: two little bumps, about the size of a child's fist were sprouting upon the girl's omoplates. All this, incidentally, occurred during high summer when women wear as few clothes as possible. The girl's friends were most astonished when they saw her walking about wearing a thick overcoat and, beneath it, a smock. The more malicious among them suggested a scandalous explanation. It is well known that smocks are not generally favoured by ladies, except in certain circumstances.

After a couple of months these bumps had taken the shape of rudimentary wings. Concealment was no longer possible. The girl became quite hypochondriac. She remained in her room, and the only good thing to come out of all this was that she now had time to read Proust, which she had been meaning to do for years.

Her friends endeavoured to console her: "After all, my dear," they said, "when the wings are fully grown there will be certain advantages. No more railway fares, no more staggering up the steps of buses. Why, you could even

take off whenever you like for Paris and touch down two hours later at Orly."

"What's the good of that," replied the girl. "Dior would have nothing to fit me."

She went out once or twice but it was not a success: she gave so many of her men friends black eyes by incautious movements of her newly-acquired members that only the most valorous among them would now come near her. And, of course, dancing was quite out of the question: men cannot bear to have their mouths full of feathers. The girl decided to see a doctor:

"Yes," replied this medico. "It's quite true that I am an æsthetic surgeon, but your infirmity, in my opinion, is a matter for the ecclesiastical authorities."

The girl went to see a Catholic priest. She had been advised that the Roman church, having been longest in existence, would be the most likely to provide a solution of her trouble

But at Farm Street, the Jesuits seemed more concerned to discover whether she was committing the sin of pride than with offering her practical aid. "You are certainly not a saint," they told her. "You must be an angel," and they explained that there were no less than ten categories of angels.

The wings were fully grown now. They were glossy, snow-white, resplendent. Sometimes, the girl gave a plume or two from them to her women friends, to put in their hats. In this way, she obtained a certain influence upon the *mode*, and was even visited by Aage Thaarup. She flew over London from time to time, too, for exercise, but her wings were so sooty when she came down that they began to cost her a fortune in soap and benzine.

"So what happened to her in the end?" asked Caroline.

"Ah, that's very tragic . . . very, very sad."

"Come on, Dormant . . . don't hold out on me."

"Well, if you must know, she's with the swans on the river at Stratford-on-Avon. Her friends go down there and throw her chocolates from the bank because she's always writing to say how much she hates breadcrumbs."

"What a *fool* you are!" Caroline burst out laughing.

"Ssh! You'll wake the whole damned house up."

"I don't care," she said. "Come here. I like you."

"I'll tell you a story every night if this is the result," he said.

But there is a snag to every happiness: if Dormant had not told his story in an amusing manner, Caroline would not have laughed so immoderately and Isabel, sitting upright in another bed ten yards away, and sleepless despite Luminal, might have continued to read the concluding chapter of a detective story, in which the murderer was about to be unmasked.

The laughter decided Isabel, who had been wanting to annoy someone since midnight. She rose, slipped on her dressing-gown. Insomniacs are quite without pity in such matters. If Caroline were awake, then what moment could be more propitious for a little chat?

Her mind already formulating the exact words of her entrance line, Isabel moved down the passage, stood for a moment before the door; then, trembling with anger, entered:

"What is this?" she said, and she switched on the light.

"That's the last question I'd have expected you to ask, dear," replied Dormant.

This pert reply did not, however, represent Dormant's true feelings. He had sometimes wondered how he would behave in the circumstances in which he now found himself, and had always assumed that he would rise, dress with such dignity as he could muster, and leave. Given sufficient time, he would of course have made with all speed for one of the

two classic hiding places: the interior of a wardrobe or the protective folds of a window curtain.

Nothing of that kind was possible now. He was naked. His pyjamas lay on a chair, well out of reach.

"Get up, Adrian, and go to your room at once," said Isabel in a hard voice.

"I can't," he said miserably.

Isabel switched off the light: "Now, will you go?" she said.

Dormant rose. He discovered, and put on his pyjama trousers, but his troubles were not at an end. Striking a match in order to search for his pyjama jacket he contrived somehow to set one of Caroline's petticoats alight. Smoke filled the room.

"Don't add arson to your other crimes, darling," said Caroline. Ignoring Isabel, she rose in her turn and doused the flames with the contents of a carafe. "Let me deal with her," she whispered.

Dormant was only too glad to abdicate that responsibility but he could not, he felt, leave, utterly routed, and without a parting shot.

"If you're nasty to Caroline," he said, "I'll crease you, Isabel."

"Run along now, dear," said Caroline. She pushed him gently into the passage, closed the door.

The two ladies faced one another.

"Caroline, I'm surprised at you. I thought you were a nice girl."

"Well, I'm not."

"And in my house, too!"

"You don't want us to catch pneumonia, do you? It's far too cold outside."

"Oh, Caroline . . . how *could* you . . . and with Dormant, too."



"What's wrong with Dormant?" said Caroline, aggressively.

"What's right with him, you mean."

"Now listen, Isabel, I won't have anything said against Dormant. It's not his fault that he isn't," and here Caroline paused, so that the words might bear their maximum impact, "a *baker*."

"We'll talk about this in the morning," said Isabel. "Of course, he'll have to go . . . and you, too, I'm afraid."

"That's all right, then," said Caroline. "We can go together."

Isabel would now like to have said something thoroughly unpleasant, annihilatory even, but the expression on Caroline's face deterred her.

It was at this moment that Arthur appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Arthur," said Caroline. "How quaint. I never knew you wore a night cap. I didn't think that *anybody* did."

"I heard sounds," said Arthur. "Is anybody ill?"

"I don't think so," said Caroline, and she smiled sweetly. "It's just that Isabel can't sleep . . . alone."

As may well be imagined, the atmosphere at the breakfast-table next morning was distinctly tense. Isabel had taken good care to arrive first, and with bacon poised upon her fork, she watched the entry, first of Caroline, then of the unshaven and harassed Dormant.

No word was spoken for some time. Then:

"Do you think our hostess has been stricken dumb?" said Caroline.

Dormant gulped his coffee, but said nothing. He was the coconut in the fun-fair. It only remained to

be seen which of the two warring ladies possessed the better aim.

"I would advise you not to be funny at my expense, Caroline," said Isabel.

"Don't be stupid, Isabel. You haven't told Arthur because you know he'd be on our side . . . but I'll tell him if you won't shut up."

"There is a letter for you over there," said Isabel to Dormant. She pointed to the sideboard.

Dormant rose. He had already reconciled himself to the fact that this was going to be a particularly unpleasant day, and therefore saw, without surprise, the name of his publishers upon the envelope, and the sinister signature of Glenn himself at the bottom of the second page.

'Dear Boy' (he read)

*'It grieves me exceedingly to write to you in this strain, but I have no choice. As you know, I never interfere or occupy myself with financial matters but, sometimes, as in the present case, they occupy themselves with me. Today I had a little chat with our Chief Accountant, Mr. Snipe, whose name will be familiar to you by reason of the many occasions on which you have placed it at the head of telegrams demanding money to be sent to you immediately in various foreign parts.*

*'Yours is a name which Mr. Snipe can bring himself to pronounce only with a deep reluctance. You will recollect that last year he suffered a nervous breakdown, and that this illness occurred shortly after the interminable negotiations required to transfer the princely sum of ninety dollars to you, in the island of Mykonos.*

*'Yet Mr. Snipe has a deep affection for you, Adrian. You make, he says, a pleasant change from our other authors, who pay income tax. You once bought him a pipe, I understand, and he has never forgotten that kindly gesture.*

*'Mr. Snipe was smoking your pipe yesterday when he informed*

*me that you are in the red to us to the sum of £1097.11.9. He is having the numerous unsold copies of your earlier novels pulped but he says that we cannot expect to receive more than £25 from this source.*

*'In these circumstances, dear boy, I feel that the best solution is for you to sign the enclosed contract, which is, as you see, for three further books. When you have written these you will be clear with us, and we shall then be able to consider other arrangements. . . .'*

"Good news?" asked Caroline.

"Glorious," said Dormant. He examined the contract. The document contained three brief clauses and bound Dormant, as far as he could see, to push a pen across paper on Glenn's behalf for the next three years. He could, of course, take some of his father's money and repay the sum owed, but the very idea of this was repulsive to him: if one could not get money out of publishers, one should at least avoid the supreme shame of giving them any.

Dormant watched Isabel rise with dignity, and leave the room. "I wonder what it was really like in those Roman galleys," he said, as he took out his pen and prepared to sign.

"Wait a moment," said Caroline. She took the contract from him. She read it: "You mustn't sign this," she said.

"I shall have to sign. It isn't his fault. I should never have become so overdrawn."

"Write books under another name," said Caroline.

"Darling, the style of good authors is recognisable . . . but so is that of bad ones."

"It doesn't say here what the books are to be *about*," she said.

"Well, good God, I should hope not!" he replied, outraged, then added gloomily: "Though don't ask me what they *will* be about. I never felt so uninspired."

"It doesn't even say they have to be novels. Why don't you begin with a biography of Glenn?"

"Yes, that's an idea. Another good idea might be to write the word 'S——' a hundred thousand times, and send it to him. They could have a wonderful publicity campaign with that: 'Everybody is reading and discussing "S——" by Adrian Dormant. This book goes straight to the point, and never leaves it.' "

"Let's go and walk in the garden," said Caroline, and profiting by a glance which he gave out of the window, to see if it was raining, she put the contract away in her pocket.

"Well, when are we off?" he said, as he threw twigs half-heartedly for the half-hearted dogs to chase.

"Whenever you say, darling."

"It's more complicated than you think," he replied. "I've got a very urgent appointment tonight."

"You're not hiding something from me, are you, Adrian?"

"Certainly not. Just a matter of business."

"Will you tell me one day?"

"I might even tell you tomorrow."

"I shouldn't worry about Isabel," said Caroline. "Just leave her to me."

"Oh, I'll do that with pleasure."

"And don't forget that your little friend is coming to dinner tonight."

"Isabel will put him off now."

"Don't you believe it. She's just dying for an opportunity to be really malicious." She took his arm. "Come in here a moment," she said.

"Why?" he said. It was muddy behind the rhododendron bush. The slightest movement caused the leaves to shed water down his neck.

"This," said Caroline, and kissed him. "Now go and do some work," she said.

"Are you going to regulate my life from now on?" he said, suspiciously.

"Yes," said Caroline. "It's time that *someone* did."

A weakening, a progressive decay of the will-power is not the least interesting phenomenon in persons subjected to the full rigours of modern society.

Certain mental ailments which cloud more particularly the impulses of the will, seem however, confined to two extremes; the first that of primitive communities, the other that of highly civilised peoples.

Dormant sat down at his desk in the pavilion. He pushed the Drawbridge manuscript away from him with loathing, and taking virgin paper and a pencil, began to draw from memory a map of Australia. When he had finished, to his satisfaction, a somewhat elongated picture of the great sub-continent, he wrote in the middle of the central desert, in a latitude roughly corresponding to that of Alice Springs, the terrible words of auto-criticism:

*'I wish I could write like Nevil.'*

and immediately beneath them, by a continuation of his thought-process, these other words:

*'The thin author's cat sat on the fat publisher's mat.'*

A most curious ailment, for example, affects certain natives of Asia and Africa who are obliged to pass through life in a lowly social condition. This ailment is known in India as the Lattah, and can be defined as a form of echokinesia, punctuated by crises, in the course of which the sick person is quite unable to prevent himself imitating any gesture made in his presence ostentatiously, and with suggestive intent. The excellent Frenchman, Repond, cites the case of a Cingalese woman who, holding her child in her arms, and leaning upon the taffrail of a ship, threw the infant into the water because someone, standing near-by, made,

intentionally, the very gesture required for her to perform this action.

It was not now, however, so much a question of Dormant writing like Nevil, as of his writing at all. The rejection of his two plots by Glenn had, as it were, paralysed his creative faculties—never at any time robust—and he could think of nothing, absolutely nothing, to say.

"I shall have to do what everyone else does in these circumstances and write about my schooldays," he thought. Indeed, given a certain amount of hard work and the ruthless elimination of all material unfavourable to oneself, it was perfectly possible—did not every spring book-list prove it—to write a trilogy concerning the pre-pubescent years of a little boy whose uncomfortable destiny it was to be unlike his fellow-urchins.

Dormant sighed. Glenn had once told him that even the most obscure of authors have their *following*, a hard core of readers, perhaps only a few hundred strong, scattered perhaps throughout the kingdom, often in the most unlikely places—a country vicarage, the night-porter's office in a power station—but faithful, truculently faithful, capable of entering bookshops and with scornful snort, of saying:

"You are not very well stocked, I see. Where is the new Dormant?"

Dormant sighed a second time. What would that hard core, fed for years on banditry and illicit love in foreign parts . . . what would they say when confronted with the schoolroom, the roller-skates and the drawing-pins laid by wicked little hands upon the Latin master's chair?

They would say that it was treason, and they would be right.

Since any solution was preferable to actually *doing* some work, Dormant took another sheet of paper and began to

compose like St. Paul before him, a letter of self-justification to the faithful:

*'My dear friends,' he wrote. 'We must all eat. A cruel and wicked man holds me in his power' . . . ?*

At this juncture, Dorman raised his head, his attention attracted by a tap upon the window-pane.

Mr. Mendoza stood outside, holding a large package in his hand.

"Come in . . . come in," said Dormant, glad of any interruption.

"My word, what a pleasant room," said Mr. Mendoza, respectfully. "I expect inspiration comes to you easily in these surroundings?"

"Oh, it is just a matter of slogging away, you know," replied Dormant modestly. "Sit down, won't you?"

Mr. Mendoza sat down. "I saw your hostess a few minutes ago," he said.

"Ah, yes? Did she cancel your invitation for tonight?"

"No, sir. On the contrary, she asked me if I could come a little earlier . . . at seven o'clock, to be precise."

"So much the better," said Dormant but, privately, he wondered what little game Isabel could be playing now.

"Has this lady been unpleasant to you, Mr. Dormant?" enquired Mr. Mendoza.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Your face is tense, sir. You are a man who reveals his secret feelings by such small details as the set of his mouth."

"We have certainly had a small difference of opinion," confessed Dormant.

"In that case I will take steps to deal with her," said Mr. Mendoza. He waved his hand. "No. . . . No . . . don't tell me anything, Mr. Dormant. It is quite sufficient for me that she has annoyed you."

"Are you proposing to become my guardian angel, Mr. Mendoza?"

"I am not, sir. That duty is performed quite adequately, I believe, by a certain charming young lady. My function is more humble. I am your moral bodyguard."

Dormant examined Mr. Mendoza reflectively. "D'you know," he said, "I find it difficult to recognise in you the same man I met in the . . ." he was about to add 'hotel bedroom', but this seemed unkind, and so he said: "In the train."

"It is merely a question of having something to do," replied Mr. Mendoza. "When a man is busy, when every hour of his day is taken up with various forms of activity, however futile, then he has no time to think. You think too much, Mr. Dormant . . . too much about yourself, I mean."

"I promise you I don't do so with the slightest pleasure."

"In my opinion, you should take a purge," said Mr. Mendoza, "calomel, for example. I once said to Sam Goldwyn, that if the prophet Isaiah had taken a purge my people would have been spared many tribulations. Sam was much struck by my remark. He was never a man to do things by halves. That evening he had a hundred-weight of chocolate laxative delivered at his house. People had to eat a couple with their cocktails. The thing might have gone a long way, but after about a week so many stars had stomach trouble that there was practically nobody on the set."

"That must have been fun," said Dormant.

"It was. Sam was a bit angry with me at first, but I soon gave him another idea. We had the laxatives made up inside regular chocolates . . . pretty boxes, too, and that kind of thing . . . and we sent them along to stars working for other corporations. No self-respecting girl would refuse to eat candy sent in by Sam Goldwyn."



"Mr. Mendoza, you are a man of many parts."

"Yes, it was something very like that the Peruvian *Chargé d'Affaires* said to me on the telephone this morning. They're going to pay up, Mr. Dormant. You have twenty years' dividends due to you, and that railway station near Lima is all yours."

"Well, I must say I'm very grateful to you, Mr. Mendoza, but I'm sure I don't know what I'll do with it."

"From the photographs," said Mr. Mendoza archly, "I would say that it would make a very charming setting for a honeymoon." He looked at his watch, then rose: "I must be off now," he said.

"Oh?" said Dormant blankly. "Where?" He was finding it increasingly difficult to keep pace with Mr. Mendoza's many activities.

"To Hawthorn Hill, to watch the horses jumping," said Mr. Mendoza. "I've a kind of idea we'll be quite rich men tonight."

"I'm very glad to hear that," said Dormant.

Mr. Mendoza laid the package which he had been carrying upon the table. His manner, until now, so self-confident, had undergone an extraordinary transformation. Mr. Mendoza was embarrassed.

"Mr. Dormant," he said. "You saw me writing yesterday?"

"I did."

Mr. Mendoza opened the package: "This is what I was writing," he said, "and it is now finished. I've been at it for a long time, but meeting a literary man like you . . . well, it sort of gave me a new enthusiasm, d'you get me? I want you to *keep* this, Mr. Dormant. It's all yours. You can knock it into shape, or tear it up, or give it away. I just want you to have it, that's all."

"But what is it about?" said Dormant.

Mr. Mendoza blushed: "I told you once about that time I was in New York . . . broke to the wide . . . slipping out of the hotel in the morning, walking all day, and coming back at night with a packet of biscuits and a bottle of milk underneath my overcoat?"

"Yes. You did."

"I thought a lot during that time, Mr. Dormant. I thought about all kinds of things, about myself just like you do, and about my life, and about Life with a big L as well . . . if that expression don't sound to you too pompous." He laid his hairy hand across the manuscript. "And I put it all down *here*, Mr. Dormant . . . all of it . . . and though I dare say it's pretty crude I've a feeling that a man like you could do something with it."

"Just a moment," said Dormant. "Are you suggesting that I should revise this, and publish it under my own name?"

"You would be doing me a great honour if you would accept that assignment, sir. Don't think too badly of me. I know it's imperunence on my part but . . . well, I reckon there's some stuff there that a writer of your eminence could play with."

"Maybe there is," said Dormant. "Maybe there is . . ."

And by lunch-time, when he had read more than half the manuscript, he was quite sure there was. Nor would it be a difficult task, he decided, to make everyone in the book Bulgarian and to set the scene in Sofia.

"Where is Isabel?" enquired Dormant at lunch-time, observing that no place had been laid for his hostess.

"I don't know," replied Caroline. "She went off in the car about an hour ago. I think she must be up to something."

"And Arthur?"

"Arthur is eating poached eggs in his study. He always lies low when there's trouble."

"But this is splendid," said Dormant. He moved her plate and assorted cutlery along the table. "Come and sit beside me. It's years since I was left alone with a girl and a whole Stilton cheese. I want beer," he shouted down the lift-shaft. A subdued hubbub of discussion could be heard, then the pulleys creaked, and a flagon of Watney's came slowly into view.

"This Stilton looks starved," pronounced Dormant. He opened a cupboard, and fed the cheese with repeated dollops of port. "Glou . . . Glou . . . Glou," said the decanter.

"Have you been working hard, darling?" said Caroline.

"I have," said Dormant. As a matter of fact, for the past hour, having put Mr. Mendoza's manuscript aside, he had been writing a description of the occasion when, aged eleven, and anxious to buy himself a new cricket bat, he had stolen what he had confidently believed to be a judicious selection of his mother's diamond bracelets, and carried them, his heart quaking with apprehension, to a pawnbroker. "*But these are glass, boy: where did you get them?*" the man had shouted, hearing which grave words Dormant had made a dash for the door, leaving the swag behind him. The story had a moral ending, too, for when his mother, invited out to dinner and unable to find her knick-knacks, had accused the cook of theft, Dormant had confessed: although this less from any genuine honesty of character than because, at that time, he lived in dread of his Redeemer's wrath. "*It is not so much your action which I condemn,*" his father had said, preparatory to beating him, "*as its object. You can sell my top-hat if you like, so long as it is to place a bet at Second Goodwood, but I refuse to have any son of mine associated with these degenerate and socially useless bat-and-ball games.*" And, having beaten Dormant, he had proceeded immediately to his study; there to write a letter to the headmaster of the child's school,

proposing the substitution of pony-racing for Rugby football during the coming winter term.

"Can you take dictation straight on to the typewriter?" enquired Dormant now, of Caroline.

"Oh, darling, I thought you wanted me for pleasure, not for business."

"We can always have a stand-easy from time to time."

"You do choose the most lovely expressions, don't you," she said.

"Dostoevsky kept his wife up night after night while he jabbered away," he replied complacently. "How she must have hated Nastasia Philippovna."

"Were you a very horrid child?" she asked, when he had explained what he intended to write.

"No. Until I was about fifteen I was very well-behaved, and also remarkably innocent. When I was leaving my prep school, the headmaster called me into his study, as he did with all the boys. I could see that the pedant was trying to explain something to me, but was damned if I could make head or tail of it. There were good boys and bad boys, it appeared. Final'y, irritated by my incomprehension, the fellow could contain himself no longer: '*Good God, how d'you think you came in'to the world?*' he roared at me. '*You surely don't imagine that any self-respecting stork would carry you?*'"

He moved over to the lift-shaft again: "What's next?" he shouted. "We're hungry up here."

The hubbub below was renewed. Presently, a large soup-tureen appeared. Dormant lifted the lid.

"Lentils," he said disgustedly. "Is this her way of punishing us?"

"I don't know," said Caroline. "Esau sold his birthright for a mess of them. Perhaps she thinks that these ones are the payment for my virtue."

By three o'clock, after a walk in the woods with Caroline and the dogs, Dormant was once more seated at his desk in the pavilion. He began to draw a map of New Zealand on a piece of blotting-paper. "*Invalids have bed-sores,*" he ruminated. "*Even professional cyclists suffer from boils. Why, then, do writers not suffer from chair-sores?*" He pulped his buttocks tentatively. There seemed to be nothing amiss. He decided, nonetheless, to place a cushion on the chair, for additional security.

By four o'clock, Dormant had written an entirely inopportune but nevertheless interesting description of the Life and Hard Times of a hedgehog which he had kept in his games locker twenty years previously. Encouraged by his evident talent for Natural History, he was about to enlarge, to give some account of cockroaches imprisoned in match-boxes, of bluebottles devoured by ants in jam-jars when he was disturbed by three sharp, imperative knocks upon the door.

Thinking that this might be Caroline, with tea, he opened the door eagerly. Maurice Welsh stood before him.

"Oh, hullo," he said, quite without enthusiasm.

"How are you, Dormant? I was passing by and thought I'd drop in." Maurice Welsh's bright stare travelled round the room rather like a searchlight beam: five seconds pause, fifteen for swivelling.

"You are the twenty-third author I've seen today," he said, when he had been asked to sit down.

"I thought you looked a bit worn."

Maurice Welsh opened a small black despatch case. He produced a clump of papers: "May I ask you for a few details about your private life?" he said.

"My books are available in most municipal libraries," observed Dormant. "If there's anything else you require

I'm sure Glenn's accountant would lend you my file "

"You mistake my meaning," said Maurice Welsh. "This is something quite different. We are getting up a reference book of authors . . . a kind of *Who's Who* of our own: in alphabetical order, needless to say."

"That seems very unfair," said Dormant. "You'll be right at the end." Then, more suspiciously: "How much does this cost?"

"Three guineas," said Welsh.

"I always did think you were a clever man," said Dormant. He made a rapid calculation: seventeen thousand books had been published in England and Wales during the course of the previous year. "It should be printed on fine art paper at that rate," he said.

"Imitation art," said Maurice Welsh. "We're putting in photographs, you see."

"Not of me, you aren't."

"My dear Dormant, everybody goes in automatically so it's ever so much better to co-operate. If you won't give us a picture of yourself then I shall have to use that one which Glenn put on the dust-jackets of your first books."

This was a terrible threat. When Dormant's father had seen that picture he had complained in the strongest terms: "*Don't I suffer enough from the garrulity of old women by the very fact of possessing a son who is an author?*" he had said. "*Must I also have him portrayed looking like a drug fiend on his way to endure the embraces of a Roman Emperor?*"

"All right," said Dormant, "what else do you want?"

"One man, one column," said Maurice Welsh. "There will be no favouritism, whatever."

"You're not going to put in all those technical bastards, too, are you?"

"There will certainly be a section devoted to television script-writers," replied Maurice Welsh primly. "Now shall

we get down to it." He produced more paper, and a gold fountain-pen. "Hobbies?" he said.

Dormant told him of one.

"Don't be facetious, Dormant. You know I can't put that in."

"Well, what the devil would you have put in about George Sand or H. G. Wells, then?"

"I should have written that they were interested in private cases of human welfare."

"That's the best name for it I ever heard," said Dormant.

Maurice Welsh sucked his pen: "Weren't you something of a mountaineer at one time?" he said.

"Oh, God! Must you bring that up?" For five years, whenever a critic had wished to be funny at Dormant's expense he would come along with some laborious metaphor in which it was a question of Snowdon being rather smaller than the Matterhorn, or, alternatively, of the weary alpinist who fell into the crevasse.

"Games?" said Maurice Welsh. "Not interested in cricket, I suppose?"

"No," said Dormant. "But you can put down that I once cleaned out Liam O'Flaherty at poker, and that takes skill."

Twenty minutes later Maurice Welsh had completed his enquiries. He tucked away his pen with an air of considerable self-satisfaction. Into his brief-case he inserted two close-written sheets of paper. "How we all love to talk about ourselves," he said. "I haven't met a single exception to that rule since morning."

"Yes," said Dormant. "If this lot doesn't get the Book Society Choice there's no justice left in the world. But won't it become out of date rather quickly? I mean, how will you keep up with the continual changes in Koestler's nationality for example?"

"There will be new editions, I hope . . . articles, too. Even in this one I have Connolly and Mortimer on the latest from Paris, and Waugh speaks for Religion with some notes on *The Origin of the Missal*."

"Hm!" said Dormant, this useful sound being an exact phonetic expression of his feelings. Then he looked at Maurice Welsh narrowly. "I'm quite sure you came to see me about something else, too," he said.

"You're quite right," said Maurice Welsh. "I did. This morning your hostess, Lady Drawbridge, rang me up."

"Did she, indeed!"

"I don't know what you've been doing, Dormant, but the plain fact of the matter is that she is not satisfied with your work."

"That's rather extraordinary, don't you think, considering that I've only been here three days and she's not even looked at it?" Dormant examined Welsh with interest. One must suppose, he thought, that the fact of his being called in to put matters straight is an unguent to his vanity: he cannot possibly *want* the work, and probably has far too much on hand already, but the thought that even an uncultivated person such as Isaac should know, instinctively, the difference between a celebrated author and a humble practitioner must be, to him, exhilarating. "How did she get in touch with you?" he said calmly.

"She rang up the newspaper. They gave her my name."

"And so you met? Will you tell me where, please?"

"At a pub in Wanborough . . . the '*Coat of Arms*' I think it's called," said Maurice Welsh uncomfortably. Clearly he was not at his best in the rôle of a conspirator.

"You should have had a look behind the potted palms," said Dormant. "There was certainly a little man there listening to your entire conversation," and he grinned as he thought of the faithful Mendoza, crouching with eyes



narrowed, eavesdropper to treason. "And so what did she propose?" he said.

"My dear fellow, she wants me to take over from you. Naturally, I explained that with writers, as with doctors, there are questions of etiquette . . . certain things which are not *done*."

"You should get out a book about that, too, some time," said Dormant. "I'll learn the rules by heart."

Maurice Welsh chose to ignore this thrust. "I informed her quite plainly," he said, "that I should have to obtain your permission first."

"You have it, my dear Welsh . . . you have it. All I ask is that you allow me just one last night's work—to put things in order for you, as it were—and as from tomorrow I will retire gracefully, though I must say," he added, "that I don't know what *he's* going to think about it all."

"Oh, I don't think that Lord Drawbridge is particularly interested, is he?" said Welsh. "From what I hear he leads a very retired life."

"Very retired," said Dormant, "but, as it happens, I wasn't talking about that particular Lord Drawbridge. Will you be doing the work in London?"

"Naturally," said Maurice Welsh. "Ah, one's ties . . . one's ties; how they accumulate. Do you know, Dormant, that I almost never get time to go down to my farm, even at week-ends, nowadays?"

Dormant said nothing, but within himself he was sharing in a strictly cerebral capacity, the relief of some honest agricultural labourer, spared, for the third Sunday in succession the dissertations of his master, cock of many hills of dung compost—these little chats—followed by such practical demonstrations as the forcing of buckets' of apple peel upon reluctant pigs in the interests of their

vitaminisation, and a lecture to the Wyandottes upon the decline in their egg-laying output.

"Of course, I don't know whether he'll *like* appearing in London," he said, reflectively.

"How do you mean?" said Maurice Welsh. "Is there some mystery about all this?"

"No," said Dormant. "None at all. You can have the fairy story: I'll tell the truth. Everything is just as it should be." The sound of a cough caused him to raise his head. "Ah," he said, "here is Arthur in person. How very apropos of you, Arthur. This is Mr. Welsh, who has written more autobiographies of members of the distinguished Upper Chamber to which you belong than any man living."

"But how very interesting," said Arthur, and he inspected Maurice Welsh benignly. "I intend to make my maiden speech there next week during the debate upon the Navy Estimates."

"Really?" said Maurice Welsh, seizing his chance. "You are interested in the Fleet, sir? I can well believe that."

"I hate the damned Fleet," said Arthur. "But fortunately I have been informed that when questions of public money are involved considerable latitude is allowed to speakers. I intend therefore to raise the question of the wanton disfigurement by a class of person whom I understand are known as trippers, by the carving of their names upon the pillars of Stonehenge."

"Won't you sit down, Arthur?" suggested Dormant.

"With pleasure," said Arthur. "It is not often that one has the opportunity of encountering two authors, discussing no doubt, the rigours of their profession and apparently upon terms of the warmest friendship."

"Authors, for their part, don't have occasion every day of meeting a distinguished geologist," replied Maurice Welsh gallantly.

"I shall never be really distinguished until I have visited both Krakatoa and Easter Island," said Arthur, "and I shall never be able to afford to do so until my grand-uncle's book is published. That is one reason I am paying you this state visit, Dormant, but a second and more important one is that I deeply regret the deplorable initiative of my wife. To be quite frank, I cannot understand the reasons for Isabel's behaviour. You were never her lover, I suppose?"

"No," said Dormant.

"Women are, indeed, most peculiar," said Arthur, and he sighed. "Perhaps I should fulfil my marital duties more frequently," he continued, again with a sigh. "I don't deny that their exercise is most pleasurable, but have you not found that there is so little *time* in life for that kind of thing?" He addressed this question—not, indeed, to Dormant, in respect of whom he considered it to be, no doubt, superfluous—but to Maurice Welsh.

"I'm afraid I'm not qualified to give you an opinion," replied Maurice Welsh, truthfully, and much to Dormant's admiration. It was, indeed, well-known in certain parts of London, that a considerable proportion of this unfortunate man's income was spent in obtaining relief from an acute prostatic trouble.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Arthur sympathetically. He turned to Dormant. "I shall also be sorry to lose Caroline," he said with a certain severity. "She is the best secretary I ever had, and it will take me months to break a new one in. Can we not come to some arrangement?"

"I'm afraid not," said Dormant. "The fact is it's high time I had a secretary myself."

"Yes . . . that's all very well, but what about the book?"

"Set your mind at rest. As from tomorrow, Mr. Welsh is taking over."

"Oh, are you?" said Arthur. "Isabel didn't tell me that. But this is splendid! We shall be able to have many a chat after dinner."

An uncomfortable silence ensued; a silence which Dormant, for once in his life unaffected by the threatened hostilities savoured to the full, as might some traditionally neutral state, a little Switzerland, regard the warlike preparations of two powerful neighbours.

"I'm afraid I shall have to work in London," explained Welsh smoothly.

"Oh, really?" said Arthur. His voice was polite, yet an unmistakably feudal note could be detected.

"Mr. Welsh has many other interests," said Dormant, only too anxious to exacerbate matters.

"Oh, really?" said Arthur again.

"You must surely have heard Mr. Welsh on the radio?" said Dormant treacherously.

"I never employ that invention except to send telegrams when at sea," replied Arthur. He subjected Welsh to a renewed but considerably less amicable scrutiny: "So you are a *critic*," he said.

Welsh was about to reply. Dormant forestalled him: "That is but one of my friend's activities," he said. "He is best known as a novelist."

"Never heard of him," said Arthur. "One of these Converts, I suppose, are you . . . look the part, anyway? I've nothing against Rome, of course, but I can't help feeling there are far too many of you . . . don't believe there's a man among you who fully understands his doctrine, either."

"I am not a Roman Catholic, sir," said Welsh, in a strangled voice. He was making a commendable effort to overcome that chagrin which all authors—even the most celebrated—are from time to time obliged to endure: the

information that fifteen books and a generation of hard work have not sufficed to bring their name to the cognisance of an apparently intelligent man.

"Exactly. Well, that's very likely why I haven't heard of you." Arthur turned to Dormant. "Why can't we have a few rip-roaring Presbyterians in our literature, or a Plymouth Brother?" he enquired.

"I believe that it is something to do with the ability to denominate a guilt complex," said Dormant.

Arthur grunted. From the feverish twistings of his buttocks on the cushions of his chair, it was evident that he was about to mount a particularly turbulent hobby-horse. Faced with the common danger both writers prepared to intervene—but, alas, their apprehensive mutters came too late to stay the flood of Arthur's eloquence:

"I mean to say . . . well, let's not beat about the bush," and Arthur proceeded to beat about the air surrounding him. "Just look at our contemporary literature! Look at Thomas Hardy, for example."

"But Hardy has been dead for thirty years," observed Maurice Welsh mildly.

Arthur brushed this aside: "It's the same thing," he said. "You're all dead while you're alive, and some of you are brought back to life when you're genuinely dead and inflicted on people who have better things to do."

"We are still remarkably useful as a pastime in railway trains," protested Dormant. The time had come, he thought for a little story: "I observed an old lady," he said, "who was listening to the television with a novel on her knees . . . and the novel was *open*, mark you, and whenever some comedian made a remark which was lacking in taste, the old lady would look down modestly at her lap and read another paragraph of her book. That exactly describes the situation of writers today."

"I don't doubt it," said Arthur. "And why, if you please? Our society is blind, faced with an unknown future, consumed by various neuroses. You people reflect that state of affairs: even your laughter is more like the grimace of despair. Fifty years ago, mankind still possessed sound teeth and was biting hard at the apple of scientific knowledge. Nowadays, it has dentures and has discovered that worms have made their home with the apple pips."

"We strive but to amuse," said Maurice Welsh.

"Nonsense," said Arthur. "There was never a writer living who didn't attempt to impose his particular point of view upon the rest of the world: that's one reason there are so many worlds. Since the first of you scratched the first letter on the first cave wall you have been leading young women into temptation, young men toward follies of which they would never even have dreamt without your guidance, and middle-aged men like myself into excesses of zeal of every kind lest they should find themselves sharing the fate of Monsieur Bovary. You are an infernal nuisance, and you lack a scientific background . . ."

Arthur might have continued in this manner for a considerable time, but an expression upon Dormant's face causing him to turn his head, he observed that something extremely scientific was standing in his own background.

This was no other than his wife, Isabel, who, having accorded Dormant a glance of extreme hostility, advanced and took hold of her husband's arm:

"Come along, Arthur," she said. "It's time for tea. You, too, Mr. Welsh, please: I'm sure you like muffins." She smiled sweetly. "We won't trouble Mr. Dormant . . . I'm sure he has a lot of work to clear up—before he leaves."

When they had gone, Dormant drew the as yet uncompleted first page of his own manuscript towards him. He sighed, then, taking up his pen, began to write:

*'Well did little Sebastian Formant remember his first game of conkers at school. Other boys, desirous of obtaining absolute inflexibility in their chestnuts, placed them beside the Cook's rice pudding in the family oven. Sébastien went further than this. Having removed the outer skin of the chestnut he replaced it as the covering of a marble of suitable size, selected from his extensive collection of these useful articles of barter. His chestnut, needless to say, proved invincible . . .'*

Dormant sighed again:

"There's only one way to get through this lot," he thought.

Rising, he walked over to the cupboard, and took out the whisky bottle.

## Fourteen

"If you will allow me to say so, sir," said Mr. Mendoza, with the suavity of the *pêche-Melba* still upon his tongue, "that was a most delightful dinner."

"Inasmuch as we began with mulligatawny soup and are now drinking port, I allow that we have achieved a certain progress," said Arthur. "Have some more port, by the way."

"With pleasure," said Mr. Mendoza. He shifted his cuffs which although soft, like his shirt, were embarrassing him by a too great obtrusion upon his thin wrists. Above the cuffs, shone the rich folds of a midnight-blue dinner jacket. In this instance, as in so many others, Mr. Mendoza's wardrobe was more suitable for Palm Beach than for Bucks.

"What about you?" said Arthur to Dormant.

"No, thank you," replied the latter: then, after a brief hesitation, "if you'll excuse me, I've something I really must do."

"By all means," said Arthur amiably.

The two men watched Dormant leave. Neither failed to observe the peculiar gait, at once shuffling and truculent, which he invariably adopted when aware that his movements were under scrutiny.

"I wonder what he can be going to do?" enquired Mr. Mendoza archly.

"For my part, I am glad that in my small way I may have enabled him to continue doing it," said Arthur.

"Ah, how so, sir?"

"Caroline came to me the other day and asked me what I thought of him."

"And what did you reply?"

"I told her that he was certainly very much more pliant and amenable than he appears at first sight."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Mendoza. "I have been telling Mr. Dormant since I met him that what he needs is the influence of a good woman."

"All women are good," said Arthur. "They are like rolls of litmus paper, with this difference . . . that since they always tear off the preceding strip it is impossible to know beforehand whether they prefer to be tinged by alkali or acids."

"That is a very profound remark, sir, if you will allow me to compliment you?"

"Oh, do you think so? I only made it because I was using litmus to test the swill of my pigs this afternoon. I have been trying to bring litmus into my conversation ever since."

"You are a remarkable man, Lord Drawbridge. I wish that I had had a closer knowledge of your character a few hours ago."

"Ah, would that have made some difference, then?"

"It would have made a very great difference, indeed,"



said Mr. Mendoza feelingly. "May I use your telephone?"  
"If you'll finish your glass of port, first . . . certainly,"  
said Arthur.

Dormant crossed the hall with firm and retributory step. He drew aside the curtains which hid from public view, the ladies' alcove. As he had anticipated, he found his hostess alone. Caroline was in the drawing-room, setting out the bridge table.

"Now, look here, Isabel, hasn't this gone far enough? Is it absolutely necessary that we should part as enemies?"

"You have behaved inexcusably, Adrian. I have nothing more to add."

"But this isn't like you. Come on, Isabel . . . 'spill the beans; what's really biting you?'"

"I must request you not to employ these vulgar British expressions in my house," said Isabel.

"My God," said Dormant. "I don't know who brought the first American to England, but from the way you all talk once you're through the Customs, it sounds as if he must have been somebody's footman."

"Must we prolong this conversation?" Isabel reclined upon her favourite perch, a chaise-longue. The general effect, if not precisely reminiscent of Madame Récamier, might have done tolerably well, from the general weariness of her attitude, for a Victorian picture, entitled: *'The Vapours'*.

"Can't you see that I don't want to talk to you," she said.

"I can see it only too damned well," said Dormant. "What's more, I've an idea that I'm coming very close to the right explanation."

"You were always so perspicacious, weren't you, Adrian?"

"Cut all that nonsense," he said, and he sat down on the

end of the chaise-longue, with his side against her shoes, looking up her shins, towards her too-full knees. "I'll tell you what it is . . ." he said, and then, quite suddenly, he stopped, and didn't tell her anything at all because he was thinking why . . . *why*, after all, why tell people what may be three-quarters of the truth or even the whole of it, but which, can only be the truth seen from outside their frontiers: a Customs officer's certificate for a knife despatched to twist within an already hard hurt heart.

Inasmuch as, what Dormant had been thinking was this: that Isabel's jealousy and bad temper had nothing *directly* to do with either himself, or even with Caroline, but was inspired by the fact that, having been for so long a period of her life a woman unpropped by principle, easy to bed, and having, when almost all had seemed lost, discovered in conjugal love and fidelity, the charm which alone could, for her, keep the grey hairs of anguish away . . . she had been therefore the more justifiably annoyed to overhear, while insomniac, evidence of the continued existence of another and more libidinous school of thought.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Darling, I'm sorry." He had, after all, once carried two tear-stained notes to the baker for her.

"Don't start being sentimental, Adrian," said Isabel. "You must know by now it doesn't suit you." What she had meant to say was: "You love to spread yourself thin as railway buffet butter over other people's troubles, don't you;" but she didn't.

Observing how things were, he put out his hand. The hand advanced, hovered over haunch, over stomach, over breast: fingers touched fingers.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm really sorry." It is not, really, when one comes to examine the question closely, the fault of literary people that they should have a tendency to describe

the manifold events of everyday life in terms of utilitarian imagery. Dormant, for example, had been about to say that he felt himself to be rather as the sausage machine, through the slotted visor of which the good red meat, once a whole and bleeding hunk, emerges in the form of stupid little worm-like steamers.

Fortunately, for once in his life, he said nothing at all.

Volcanoes give premonitory signs, warning of eruption. With women, though the lava burns and flows as fiercely, this can never be the case; because women, unlike men, have many of their secular actions governed by such stellar agents as the moon, Dubhé—and, in those cases where they may retain an element of virtue which is as a clean kernel in a crumbling nut—by the planet, Venus.

"Isabel," said Dormant. "We'll go away. Don't worry."

"You don't have to go away," she said. "Not really. I was just a fool."

"How the *devil* did I make you say that?" said Dormant. "We ought to have had somebody here taking it all down."

Isabel burst into tears: zig-a-zag-a-zag . . . zig-a-zag-a-zag. Max Factor had married somebody beneath him on her face, but now both parties were on their way in a brown rivulet, towards her chin.

"If you really want to know why I was so horrid . . ." she said.

"I don't want to know at all, at all," he replied. But of course he did. The little Dorrit in them all was always wide-awake in Dormant.

"You must have seen the maid give me a letter that evening," said Isabel.

"Yes," he said, "I remember: I remember very well."

"It was from Harry, my first husband," she said, "and it announced with much glee his coming second marriage." She paused: "He described his bride," she said.

Dormant looked at her for a long time. Then he bent, and he kissed her left knee-cap.

"I never did think that it was women's *fault*," he said. "Poor Isabel. I'm so sorry you are all so much more loyal, when the mania hasn't got you in its grip."

"Dormant," said Isabel. "If you were writing a book, wouldn't you have stopped at the point where you kissed my knee?"

"Were you able to get through on the telephone?" enquired Arthur.

"No," said Mr. Mendoza. Then, with a rather hurried *non-sequitur*:

"How peaceful it is in your library."

"Yes," said Arthur. "Yes," and he stretched his legs. "But soon they will come and make us play bridge." He looked in a curious way at Mr. Mendoza. "Have you known Adrian Dormant long?" he said.

"No, not very long."

"Would it be indiscreet if I asked what is the degree of your friendship?"

"I have an idea that he considers me to be his conscience, sir," replied Mr. Mendoza in a neutral voice.

"That is very interesting . . . very interesting, indeed," said Arthur, and he blinked. "Isn't it extraordinary how women gossip," he said. "They mean no disloyalty, but the impulse is too strong for their small reserves of reticence. The other day my wife told me something about Dormant, which she had heard from Caroline. As so often happens, I knew what she told me already because I was in Salonika when Dormant was in Athens: and whenever there is a British colony anywhere, such things get about."

"What was it?" said Mr. Mendoza.

"It concerned his relations with his wife, which were profoundly unsatisfactory," said Arthur.

"I see," said Mr. Mendoza.

Arthur shook his head: "No, I don't believe you can possibly see," he said, "but I will explain to you." He poured himself a small tot of whisky. "I have often thought," he continued, "that if I had not become by predilection and training an archæologist, I might have entered the field of psychology. You have perhaps noticed that men like myself, who are rather ineffectual in their own lives, have remarkable powers of aiding others, equally ineffectual in theirs. Have you ever been married yourself, by the way?"

"I have been three times in Reno, sir," replied Mr. Mendoza. "What's more, I lost a packet every time at the gaming table. That old canard about '*Unlucky in love*', and so on, is a God-damned lie put about by professional poker players."

"Let us hope that, with my aid, you will win at bridge this evening," replied Arthur. "Will you excuse me a moment?" He rose, opened a drawer, and returned with two separate clumps of paper, each of them secured together by pins. "When I was younger, and more categorical about many things," he said, "I took a practical interest in certain case-histories. Here is one"—he lifted the first of his set of papers—"which deals with the case of the son of a cousin of mine; a boy who was later killed in the war. I think that if I read it to you, a distinct parallel with Dormant's state of mind will suggest itself."

"I am not quite happy, sir, about discussing Mr. Dormant in his absence," demurred Mr. Mendoza.

"I can assure you there is nothing he would like better," replied Arthur. "Shall I proceed?"

Mr. Mendoza inclined his head in affirmation.

Arthur consulted his papers: occasionally he read from the

text, occasionally he spoke *extempore*. "When this boy was very young, about eight," he said, "he was always losing things . . . not breaking them, but arranging that they disappear. He would lose the presents which people gave him. He would mislay things belonging to his mother and father . . . and it seemed that he did not hide them deliberately but quite genuinely *lost* them. And when he was punished he would cry, as children will, in a heart-rending way, and there could be no doubt that he considered himself the victim of a grave injustice."

"Please continue, sir," said Mr. Mendoza.

"One day, when I was at his house," said Arthur, "I invented a little game to play with this boy. I brought with me about twenty coloured pencils—you will see why in a moment—and I suggested that, while I closed my eyes, he should hide them. He did so, and of course, I found them all fairly quickly. We then played the game again, and this time he found better hiding places, but I discovered the pencils nonetheless. At this stage, he became really excited and used all his ingenuity to find hiding-places so extraordinary that I would never think of looking in them. He was young and more agile than I, and it is interesting to note that some of these caches were out of my reach—but another thing which is more interesting still, is that he himself forgot this time where certain of the pencils were hidden."

"So what did he do then?" enquired Mr. Mendoza.

"He did what I was hoping for," said Arthur. "He sulked, and sitting down, refused to play any more. Instead he began to draw with the remaining pencils and what he drew was very interesting."

"I'm glad to hear that, sir," said Mr. Mendoza. "In my experience, children never seem to draw anything but airplanes these days."

"There were aeroplanes, then, too," said Arthur, "and

after this boy had sketched a few soldiers just to get his hands like all children, he drew some. 'Guns were firing at these aeroplanes, but the shells which should have been rising were in point of fact falling down on the guns themselves. It was the same too with the bombs that the aeroplanes were dropping on the guns; a whole selection of arrows showed very clearly that the bombs, having fallen a certain distance, would rise again and destroy their former host. Do I make myself clear?'"

"I believe so, sir," said Mendoza. "If I get you, the lad was always in trouble with his Mother and Dad. He expected to be punished for losing the pencils and, as far as I can make out, he *wanted* to be punished."

"Exactly," said Arthur. "And in the person of that poor boy—who was killed, incidentally, and caused a number of other soldiers to be killed, while performing an action of great bravery but extreme and wilful stupidity—you have the whole problem of our friend, Dormant, in so far as I understand it."

"But how?" said Mr. Mendoza.

"Dormant," said Arthur, "detested his mother. You will ask why? I will tell you. She was constantly ill, and finally bed-ridden. She could do little to help her son, and from the most tender age her odour—and the odour of the mother is extremely important for children—must have been associated in his mind with that of medicine bottles. . . ."

"I don't like it that you talk of my friend in this way," said Mr. Mendoza uncomfortably.

"No, of course not, but you will listen all the same because what I am saying is the truth, and it is also interesting. Am I not right?"

"Very well . . . go on, please, Lord Drawbridge."

"The mechanism of the unconscious can be *'most peculiar,'*" said Arthur. "Not only this, but when men who

can read into other men's minds attempt to cure them of their ills, they often come up against an unexpected enemy, and that is the resistance which the sick man opposes, also unconsciously, to every attempt at a cure. Dormant, for example, suffers from no natural incapacity; indeed, during a large part of his life he has been more than normally pre-occupied with women, and this is because in each successive woman he has been looking for the mother who, from his point of view, he never had . . . but whom, at the same time, he could *master*. His somewhat exaggerated interest in sport and physical prowess is, again, a protest against the invalidism of his own mother. So is the cult for his father. However, let us proceed . . . In due course, Dormant married. His courtship was hurried, the ceremony itself performed without either party reflecting that the adventure upon which they were about to embark was a serious one. Of course, Dormant could not foresee what would happen. Yet everything that I have heard indicates that, unconsciously, he *desired* that it should happen. His wife was never his wife—could *not* be his wife—because, in his eyes, she was identified with the mother who, ever since his birth, had been unable to be a real wife to his father."

"Do you seriously mean all this, sir?" said Mr. Mendoza.

"I do," said Arthur.

"But what will happen to him now when, as far as I can see, he plans to get married again?"

"Nothing," said Arthur. "The great value of the unconscious when considered as a lethal weapon is that it has only one bolt to shoot . . . and when it has shot it, that particular complex is dead, and—with people like Dormant, anyway—another begins."

"You astonish me, sir," said Mr. Mendoza. "I've never considered such questions before, and I don't know that I altogether approve of doing so now."



"My dear Mr. Mendoza," said Arthur. "If I remind myself of a priest who is an excellent preacher, but who knows himself to be horribly sinful at heart . . . you, for your part, put me in mind of a man who comes to a doctor and describes to him in detail the symptoms of an entirely imaginary malady."

"How so?" said Mr. Mendoza. It was apparent that although almost invariably good-tempered he was now distinctly piqued.

"You do not really yearn for the days when you were a great man in the cinematograph industry," said Arthur. "In fact, I suspect that you would hate to go back to them and are very much happier as you are."

"Yes," said Mr. Mendoza philosophically. "That may very well be so."

"I am quite sure it is so," said Arthur. "Man is quite willing to admit that everything should change . . . except himself. But even a change of surroundings implies that he must adapt himself to new conditions. Yet you will always find that men hesitate to do so . . . that they refuse to go beyond a certain limit. Take the case of the British in India, for example: curry for luncheon, but gin at dusk."

"Sir," interpolated Mr. Mendoza. "You'll forgive me saying that we are not discussing Life in the Punjab, but the case of a penniless American in England."

"It makes no matter," replied Arthur. "These things are universal. You won over five hundred pounds for Dormant at the racing this afternoon, I understand. You would have preferred to impress him by other means but that is the way you know, and to which you cling, as certain sick men cling to their sickness because to be cured would present new problems."

"Am I really so ill, do you think?" said Mr. Mendoza, who was evidently somewhat alarmed.

"Yes," said Arthur, "You are ill, and I am ill. We are almost all of us ill, though my wife is a notable exception . . . or rather her complaint is less noble than ours, and might 'conveniently' be compared to an ingrown toenail which although painful is also considered as somewhat ludicrous."

"But what shall I do about it?" said Mr. Mendoza. There was a note of desperation in his voice.

"Do?" said Arthur. "Why, nothing, my dear fellow . . . nothing at all. If I were a doctor and you had reason to believe that I possessed some magic formula, you would come to me and say: '*Doctor . . . I have this symptom, and that-one. Please help me,*' and I would give you a prescription with a few scribbled lines and you would go away cock-a-hoop and bursting with joy . . . and do you know what would happen next?"

"No, I do not, sir."

"Less than a day later you'd be back, and you would say: '*Doctor, it's the most terrible thing but when I left you and was on my way to the chemist, I must have lost your prescription. Do write it again for me.*' And I would do so, though I would be better employed in mending the holes in your pockets, for neither the second time, nor any other, would you ever reach, what I understand you call the drug-store, with the paper still in your possession."

"Well," said Mr. Mendoza, shaking his head. "All this what you say is too deep for me, Lord Drawbridge. I grant you I sometimes feel pretty blue and depressed, but on the whole I'm a cheerful man, and take life as it comes. Do you blame me for that?"

"Certainly not," replied Arthur warmly. "Furthermore, the march of events in the world is very much in your favour. Certain people—of which I should say you were one, and Dormant another—fulfil themselves only in times

of social convulsions and revolutionary struggles. Those times will come again. You may safely await anarchy. As for me I await only death, and the vindication during my lifetime of various theories which I hold respecting the foundations of the City of Nineveh." Arthur broke off: "*What is all that damned noise I hear?*" he said sharply.

"I hear no noise," replied Mr. Mendoza uncomfortably.

"You must be deaf, then, man. Listen . . . !"

They listened. After a moment Arthur rose, drew back the curtains and opened the window. Something very peculiar was taking place, and that not very far away, either.

A sound as of animals in pain, of dumb and helpless creatures confronted, to say the least, by vexatious and unexpected circumstances could be heard quite clearly.

And the sound was that of lowing.

"Something is wrong with my herd," said Arthur, transformed in an instant from an amateur philosopher into a gentleman farmer.

At this moment, Isabel flung open the door and, by the very violence of her gesture, caused her copious but rather slackly hanging jade necklace to vault over her shoulder. "Arthur," she cried. "Quick! Do something. Get a gun and go out. The cowhand says he has heard lorries. Twenty-four of our shorthorns are missing."

"Well, I'm . . ." said Arthur. He never completed the sentence because in the middle of it he looked round, desiring to secure Mr. Mendoza as a witness of this extraordinary occurrence.

But Mr. Mendoza had disappeared: only too probably through the open window.

The fog of chill December began to fill the room.

Dormant and Caroline were performing sedentary acrobatics in the pavilion.

Upon the pretext that if she were to take the dictation of Mr. Mendoza's manuscript in its revised form, then, it might be better if she were to make a preliminary study of the work, Dormant had persuaded Caroline to sit on his knee. The situation, as it would have been described by Arthur Drawbridge in terms of alluvial strata, was therefore as follows: beneath all, the arm-chair, the springs of which, sorely tried, wailed in protest from time to time; above the chair, Dormant, enduring dolorous and increasing cramp in his knees but unwilling to admit this fact; above Dormant, Caroline, wriggling uneasily, in part because of the unsuspected sharpness of her lover's ossature, and in part because of the effect produced by his champing knees upon the equipoise of her suspender belt; above Caroline, the manuscript; and above all, rather like candles on a birthday cake had they been static, but in point of fact more like a couple of frenzied fireflies, Dormant's hands, now occupied in turning a page, now with more carnal employ.

And it was upon this scene, so charmingly domestic, that the agitated shadow of Mr. Mendoza, silhouetted by the light from the house imposed itself.

"Now what the devil's happened?" said Dormant, when he had, without the slightest consideration of the nautical and drawing-room by-law that ladies proceed first, disengaged himself.

"They've done it," said Mr. Mendoza. His face was a twitching mask of apprehension as if he were pursued, not by the comparatively amenable Arthur, but by a band of sanguinary Poles, bent upon a pogrom.

"What have they done? . . . when? . . . who? . . . where?" exclaimed Dormant, the various exclamations coming rather like the successive explosions of a petard, of which the centre piece, the grand slam, must inevitably be heard within a brief delay. He had, indeed, heard many and

most peculiar noises, but being essentially a town dweller had associated the farmyard uproar with the natural cacophony of a country night.

Mr. Mendoza explained his unhappy predicament.

"But how did you come to know these people . . . who are they?" said Dormant, curiosity overcoming for the moment the exacerbation of his nervous system.

"Just friends," said Mr. Mendoza vaguely. "I tried to telephone and stop them," he said, "I really did. As soon as I set eyes on Lord Drawbridge I realised that I couldn't let the thing go through."

"Nobody asked you to let it go through," said Dormant savagely. "On the contrary, I warned you in the hotel yesterday not to monkey around with those shorthorns. How much are they worth, anyway?" he asked suspiciously.

"I daresay that depends whether they're alive or dead, doesn't it?" put in Caroline sweetly. Although she had so far said nothing it seemed now from her tone of voice, from the way in which she moved across the room and stood beside him that her sympathies lay with Mr. Mendoza.

Dormant looked at her aggressively. "Can one disguise a shorthorn?" he said. "I mean . . . it isn't like a car, is it?" A frightful suspicion was forming in his mind that he might have to spend the next month at Agricultural Shows in every part of England, tracking down prize bulls and winning milk-yielders.

"I daresay one can do wonders with a spot of paint," said Caroline. "How many have they taken?"

"I don't know yet, ma'am," replied Mr. Mendoza, misery in every syllable.

"You don't know . . . you don't know," roared Dormant, the clamour of his voice blending with the other, the greater clamour which could be heard coming from the direction of the house, as helpless domestic servants were

mustered, handed torches, and despatched to search the estate. "You don't know," he repeated. "Well, bloody well hire a taxi, man, and get after them before they start butchering the bastards." He paused, but only to draw breath: "Where are they going, anyway?"

"To Wiltshire," said Mr. Mendoza.

"Then that's where you're going too . . . and don't think I'll stand by you if they put you in the dock. I'll deny everything . . . I'll turn King's Evidence, if necessary." He pointed to the open door: "Now, get cracking."

"Just a moment," Caroline interposed herself between the two men. "Adrian, will you please *not* talk to Mr. Mendoza in that way."

"*What?*" spluttered Dormant. "Do you realise that, thanks to this imbecile, we may all be in gaol by morning?"

"Mr. Mendoza is not an imbecile," replied Caroline composedly. "Furthermore, I am perfectly sure he acted in what he considered to be my best interests."

"Whose interests did you say?"

"Mine. Isn't that so, Mr. Mendoza?"

"It is, indeed, ma'am. I was thinking only of your happiness."

"You see!" said Caroline triumphantly. She laid her hand with gentle possessiveness upon Mr. Mendoza's arm, and to Dormant's disgust and consternation, proceeded to stroke it. "Come along," she said brightly. "First we'll fix Isabel so that she has some sort of a story ready for the Police when they come . . . then we'll ring up Wanborough and get ourselves a car . . . then we'll start off after your pals. I'm really quite looking forward to it, you know . . . it'll be just like that chase they always have at the end of one of those films by Mr. Rank."

"Now look here . . ." began Dormant.

Caroline turned towards him coldly: "As for you," she

said, "the best thing you can do is to get on with your *writing*. In future you had better leave business to people who understand it."

## *Fifteen*

SHORTLY after eleven o'clock the hubbub began to die down. It had reached a crescendo shortly before that hour when a Police Inspector, perhaps losing his way, or more probably only vaguely apprised of the species to which the missing animals belonged, had blundered into the model pigsties, and there, unlatching a door, had released a prize boar, eager for rut. The boar, having first bitten the Inspector, had charged, and broken down a second door; that which gave access to the quarters of a favourite sow,

The anguished squeals of this poor beast and the satisfied grunts of her oppressor continued to be heard throughout the night; long after the Police had departed, and the servants been despatched to bed.

Dormant never discovered exactly what Caroline said to Arthur, but no doubt it was in the nature of a guarantee that his property would be restored within a brief delay. From that moment, Arthur, revealing qualities of leadership wholly in keeping with his distinguished ancestry assumed a command so general and so absolute that he was able to deal with even the most unexpected of contingencies: such as that arising when Mr. Mendoza, who had considered it prudent to remain in hiding until the arrival of his taxi, was flushed from behind the clump of rhododendron bushes by a posse of energetic constables and pursued across the croquet lawn; an event which Dormant witnessed through a chink in the pavilion curtains.

As is commonly acknowledged, it is always very difficult to

dislodge the British police force when they have obtained a footing upon private property, and this the more especially so when they have brought with them the paraphernalia of their ghastly trade. That Arthur was able to do so at all was due to two factors: the first that he sent his wife, precipitator of the crisis, to her room and there locked the door upon her: the second his status as a non-practising but nonetheless respected magistrate and possessor of much temporal power in the neighbourhood.

The men who had already begun to illuminate the dripping woods with the horrid glare of carbide lamps were told to dismantle their apparatus and go home. Other kneeling men, who at first sight appeared to be playing mud-pies but who, in reality, were attempting to take plaster casts of tyre tracks, were invited to the house, told to wash, given a tot of whisky and dismissed in their turn at about the same time as a taxi called at last for Caroline and Mr. Mendoza, and Dormant, again peering and observing their departure, wondered churlishly just how much of his small capital this night's work would cost him.

For Caroline had not even come to say good-bye to him.

So vicious, indeed, was Dormant's mood as he waited for the stroke of midnight that he could obtain relief in no other way than by an examination of the many books upon medical subjects—possibly representing one of Arthur's earlier interests—with which the pavilion shelves were filled. Hesitating before so large a choice, he plumped at last for a manual concerning cellular metabolism.

*'I am going to see my father,'* he thought, *'I am going to see my father,'* and he would never be quite sure whether he had chosen this particular book by accident, or because it dealt with that disease which had driven his father to a hateful death:



*'To prevent the growth of a cancer is one problem,' he read, 'but to cause the death of cancerous cells in a living creature is quite another. These cells, which participate in the circulation of the blood, receive in consequence the oxygen necessary for respiration and are thus able to live without the aid of glucose. Even if we were able to eliminate sugar entirely from the blood, the existence of cancerous cells would be in no way menaced. . . .'*

Dormant looked up. The peculiar, bluish, smoky spiral which announced either the arrival of the second Lord Drawbridge from the other world, or his imminent departure towards it, was now forming in the middle of the room.

Tonight, however, certain technical difficulties accompanied the manifestation. The legs, for example, attired in their Court hose were quite distinct, but above the waist the form was blurred. The head could not be seen at all.

"Can you hear me?" said Dormant.

"Certainly," came the Ghost's voice.

"Well, stop playing the fool, then. You wouldn't do it if you realised how damn silly you look cut in half."

"I'm doing my best," said the Ghost reproachfully. "It's a question of transmission. I am bringing you certain documents. Please have patience with me. The effort which I have to make is very great."

And, effectively clasped in one of the blurred hands, Dormant could make out a dark clump, resembling paper.

"Don't bother about your head. Give me what you have in your hand."

"That's all very well," said the Ghost, "but without my head I can't see you. It also seems somewhat discourteous."

The body was now visible to a point about six inches beneath the shoulders. This meant that the arms appeared as if detached from it, and as if possessed of an independent life.

"Would you like to sit down?" said Dormant.

"Yes, please, if you would be so good as to guide me."

"How the devil can I do that when I can't even touch you?"

"You may not be able to touch me," said the Ghost, "but you will find that what I have in my hand is perfectly tangible."

"Give," said Dormant.

The Ghost gave and, immediately he had done so, his whole person became clearly visible.

Dormant found himself the possessor of a pile of something which was white, and yet which was not paper, which crinkled in his hands and yet which was, in some way, faintly disgusting to the touch.

"What is this?" he said. "Some kind of papyrus?"

"Dried ectoplasm," replied the Ghost. "If you hold one of the sheets you will see the Master's watermark upon it."

Dormant held a sheet up to the light: the texture bore a certain resemblance to the coagulated scum of skimmed milk; the writing upon it might have been that of the monk, Bede. "Good heavens," he exclaimed, "I never really believed until now that he possessed a tail and horns."

"He doesn't," said the Ghost. "What you see there is a simple concession to public taste." He came over to the table. "I must now ask you to help me," he said. "Whilst hither bound I was able to feel and hold my burden, but now I am powerless to touch it."

"Oh, really?" said Dormant. I am being thoroughly hateful, he thought, and yet there seemed no way of stopping the spray of his accumulated bile upon this innocent.

"I have brought you two things," said the Ghost. "One is mine. About the other we will speak later, if you have no objection."

"Do you get any reward for this?" said Dormant.

"Yes," said the Ghost. "When I leave you tonight I shall be allowed to see my wife for a few moments."

"What will you say to her?"

"I shall not be able to say anything, but she will have an opportunity of studying the expression upon my face."

*Is it possible to apply this single simple principle: to kill, in fact, the cells of tumours, by depriving them of energy?*

*It would seem, at the first glance, that one cannot answer this question in the affirmative. It is not, after all, the cancer cell alone which requires energy: but all cells. And, what is more grave, the cancer cell has greater reserves than the normal cell. . . .*

"I have dictated my book for you," said the Ghost.

"You were able to do that?"

"Yes. I was provided with the necessary facilities. We do not count time as you count it, you know."

"And you really wish me to publish it under my own name?"

"Yes, that is what I want you to do."

"You understand that the whole proceeding is a form of chicanery which can bring you no relief in worldly terms, at any rate?"

"Yes, I understand that . . . but I also appreciate the fact that you have been good to me."

"I?" said Dormant. "I, good to you?"

*For, yes: the cancer cell has two choices, two paths to destiny: it may breathe, or it may ferment, while the normal cell may only breathe. One, and one alone, of the two actions necessary to kill the cells of cancer—the suppression of the supply of oxygen—suffices to cause the annihilation of a normal cell.*

"What I have dictated is the truth," said the Ghost.

"The truth as you have described it to me?" said Dormant.

"More than that: the truth as it would appear from *her* point of view."

"They seem to grant you extraordinary facilities where

you come from," said Dormant. "I suppose I don't need to tell you what has been happening down here in the last twenty-four hours?"

"No," said the Ghost. "You do not."

"Then you understand that a man called Maurice Welsh is henceforth in charge of your official autobiography?"

"I understand perfectly. I am very pleased that it should be so. I have no animosity whatever against my descendants. Indeed, I feel considerable guilt whenever I think of them."

"What you have laid here on the table," said Dormant, "will not suddenly melt away, or anything like that, will it?"

"Yes," said the Ghost. "In four days, it will. I tried to obtain an extension for you, but the quality of impermanence is very deeply rooted in our social system."

Dormant sighed: "Dostoevsky," he said, "oppressed by his creditors, passive in his expectancy of the coming fit, dictated night after night to his unfortunate wife, whose heroism no one has ever bothered to record. I suppose that without his genius, and not even dealing with my own work, that I can do the same."

"I assure you that Dostoevsky is a changed man today," said the Ghost. "Not so long ago, he actually paid Turgeniev back every rouble he owed him, in the form of counters for our canteen."

"Are there no writers at all, then, in Heaven?" said Dormant.

"Only Walter Scott so far as I know," said the Ghost, "though I have heard that they are keeping a sinecure there for a man called Greene."

"A sinecure, you say?"

"All he will have to do will be to spit on the harps. The others will rub them, making them shine."

"If you had not retrieved your head," said Dormant, half an hour later, "I suppose you would not have been able to drink that tot of whisky?"

"No," said the Ghost, "I would not have."

"Promise me one thing," said Dormant. "I quite understand that you detest London, but I would so much like you to appear just *once* before Maurice Welsh. Believe me, it would shake him very considerably, and he is a man who badly needs shaking."

"I will, of course, appear before him," said the Ghost, "but I shall not be able to say anything."

"That doesn't matter. What matters is that he should see you. Having never seen a Ghost, he imagines himself to be a Voltairean."

"Has he female staff?" enquired the Ghost, with a glint in his eye.

"He signs his correspondence, I understand," said Dormant, "at about half-past five in the afternoon."

"I spoke about your trouble to Henri Beyle," said the Ghost.

"Ah, what trouble was that?"

"Your constant need to attack what I understand is known as the bourgeoisie."

"There is no bourgeoisie in England," said Dormant. "Only slight, but easily identifiable differences of accent."

"Henri Beyle does not share your opinion. With a spirit of abnegation which I can only recommend he went to our very well-stocked library and took out, and read, all your books."

"That was damned decent of him," said Dormant.

"I think so, too," said the Ghost. "When I saw him a little later he asked me to tell you something."

"Ah, yes? What was it?" said Dormant suspiciously.

"He said that you should take a little more care not to confuse your effects and that you really must endeavour not to write more than three books at once."

"He's a fine one to talk," said Dormant. "Look at *Lucien Leuwen*."

"That is precisely what we happen to be looking at," said the Ghost. "If you would take the trouble to remove my own work from the top, you will discover beneath it the continuation of that unfinished book, which Stendhal has now written, and is giving to you, to do with as you please."

"No," said Dormant. "No, it can't be so." He was appalled, and felt himself to be the thing beneath the stone at the idea of such a responsibility.

"What happens?" he said. "What has he made happen?"

"Why, what do you think . . . he marries her," said the Ghost.

"I am a stupid, useless, lazy man. I have no right to tinker with anything written by a genius," said Dormant.

"I must say that I am very glad to see you arriving at last at some compromise with modesty," said the Ghost.

"When people are great, I arrive very easily," said Dormant.

"But so few people are great, like that one. I am no good as a writer. I am just a poor fellow with a pen in his hands . . . and confusion, confusion, confusion. But I would die for Stendhal. All of us who have the leprosy would die for a word thrown in the air against Stendhal."

"And against Flaubert, too?" said the Ghost. "Henri asked me to obtain your opinion on that point."

"My dear Lord Drawbridge," replied Dormant with something like a resumption of his normal, *nacré* manner: "My dear Lord Drawbridge, you cannot expect me to admire a man who, perhaps was indeed, as I believe, the

greatest of writers, but who was nevertheless panic-stricken in the presence of women.”

Perhaps because this was destined to be his last visit to the Pavilion, the Ghost had drunk rather more whisky than had hitherto been his custom.

This alcohol, however, had no appreciable effect upon his behaviour, and when, at a few minutes to three o'clock he rose, in preparation for his disappearance, his gait was perfectly steady, and his manner more cordial than Dormant ever remembered having seen it.

“I cannot tell you,” he said, “how much I have enjoyed our encounters, despite the painful circumstances which attended them.”

“It is very civil of you to say that,” replied Dormant. “But is there no hope of our meeting again?”

“If you continue to lead your present mode of life, I should say there is a very strong chance, indeed. But that will be in the next world, of course . . . in this one I fear that our association must end.”

“Well,” said Dormant. “You can't deny that you offer me every inducement to pursue a sinful path. There seems to be absolutely nobody in Heaven whom I would want to meet at all.”

“Very possibly,” said the Ghost. “But if I may give you a warning, it is: not to overdo things. You must remember that I am not by any means in the last and most terrible of the pits. Furthermore, I have been given to understand that you are very much in love at the present time. You should therefore control your behaviour so that it affords you some chance of accompanying your future wife into the after world.”

“Your ideas about women seem to be tinged with distinctly Victorian premises concerning their purity,” said

Dormant. "I am quite sure the lady you mention will be able to keep pace with me and, anyway, it may be that we shall have had quite enough of each other here below, and have no desire at all to share a shovel through eternity."

During the half-hour previous to this morsel of dialogue, the pair had been discussing matters germane neither to the contents of this book, nor to their business together. Dormant, who had no sociological interest whatever in the events of his own age, was fascinated by those which had taken place in his country three generations previously and it was only now, looking at the clock, that he realised how much time he had wasted—time which the Ghost had perhaps deliberately caused him to waste—in discussion of such matters as the organisation of the Expedition despatched to Khartoum for the relief of General Gordon.

With but five minutes remaining, he fingered the two piles of ectoplasm manuscript with deep yet contained envy, the Ghost having warned him that, owing to some technical detail connected with their acclimatisation in the world of men, he must on no account open and read them before twelve hours had passed.

"At least tell me this," he said. "In this new account of your life you have told the whole truth, I trust?"

"I have done more," said the Ghost. "I have told the truth as it can be seen from the complete lack of serenity of my present circumstances."

"And you have no objection if I make certain revisions. To be quite frank, while I can pass off Stendhal's book as an exercise in *pastiche*, I very much doubt whether my publisher will believe me capable of having written a Victorian novel."

"You may do as you please," replied the Ghost amiably, "provided that you change nothing in my conduct, nor in the sordid motives which inspired it."



"In that case," said Dormant, "I can see quite clearly that all the critics will think that this is just another of my well-known autobiographical novels. However, never mind—any sacrifice is worth making just to see my publisher's face when thinking he has me hamstrung. I arrive within a week with two completed manuscripts."

"Do you find inspiration, then, so difficult at the moment?" enquired the Ghost, with an air of concern.

"My dear fellow, if it was possible for me to give *you* something instead of the other way about, I should ask you to take Stendhal the first chapter of a novel about my school-days which I have been writing. I daresay he could do with a good laugh. It's terrible."

"Why don't you write a novel about Ghosts?"

"Because they don't sell, my good man."

The Ghost seemed somewhat disconcerted by this replique: "I shall have to tell Henri Beyle that," he said. "Ever since, thanks to you, he has had this wonderful opportunity to place his work, he has been quite . . . well, *literally* quite fired with enthusiasm so that one seldom sees him in the recreation periods now without a pen in his hands, and there have been some very painful scenes between him and Chateaubriand, for Henri, too wishes to call his new book: *Memoires d'Outre Sepulcre*."

"*Memoires d'Outre lit* would be better," said Dormant. "He has certainly a number of unfinished books he could get on with. It's a pity that we can't come to some permanent arrangement." He recollected a question which he had been intending to ask: "And what did he say about my query concerning Mademoiselle de la Mole?"

"Well," said the Ghost, and he appeared to be choosing his words carefully. "First of all, he made the remark concerning the impetuosity of your literary character, which I have already quoted to you, and then he added—when I

had explained something of your circumstances—that he could not understand why, when there was a Countess in the house, you should have chosen to make her secretary your mistress.”

“Still as much of a snob as ever, I see,” said Dormant. He looked at the clock. “Two minutes more. . . . May I take it that my father will be on time?”

“Absolutely punctual,” said the Ghost. He looked longingly at the table. “Could I ask you one last favour?” he said.

“What is it?”

“The final page of the original manuscript of mine which you have there.” The Ghost hesitated. “May I read it just once again?”

“But you’ve told me a dozen times that it’s all lies, man.”

“Not that page. That page is the truth.”

“In spite of the fact that you wrote it three years before your death?”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” said Dormant, impressed. He relinquished his chair. The Ghost sat down. Dormant stood behind him, reading over his shoulder. He knew, of course, that the last pages of the manuscript described a death-bed scene but, having read them subsequent to the Ghost’s revelations, they had left no very deep impression upon his mind so that now he was curious to observe what effect they would have upon this man who, in life, had planned and penned them.

The effect was immediate and most moving. Almost from the moment that the Ghost began to read his shoulders shook: he was sobbing with a despair, half-strangled but still ardent:

*“A couple of days went by, but the poor sufferer still lived.*

*Perfectly conscious now, he was able to speak audibly, but the doctor had at last declared, positively, that his hours were numbered, and that he must prepare for death.*

*"Locke received the announcement with composure, saying nothing at the time, nor for many hours afterwards. Suddenly, his young wife who, as usual, sat beside the bed, heard him speak.*

*" 'Is anyone there?'*

*" 'I am here,' she replied. 'Can I do anything for you?'*

*" 'Alas, no,' he said in a whisper, 'alas, no.'*

*"This was too much for the poor girl to bear: 'Oh, husband. I am yours and yours alone,' she cried, and as she spoke, she clasped his wasted hand in hers, while the hot tears fell upon it from her eyes. She felt his hand tremble in hers at these words, as though smitten with the palsy, while rasping sobs told her how deeply he was moved.*

*" 'Sweetheart,' she said, 'I have nothing to forgive. You have never been a sinful man.'*

*"It seemed at first that Locke would never be sufficiently composed nor possess sufficient strength to speak again, but after she had given him some restorative medicine left for his use, and he had lain quiet for a considerable time, he rallied and was able to address her:*

*" 'My darling,' he said. 'You have returned good for evil. I am justly punished. Thank God that we have become reconciled. Do not forget me. Kiss me once again.'*

*"The wife stooped above the dying man. She placed her lips to his. There was a slight movement as if Locke were endeavouring to return the kiss, but his effort was unavailing. A convulsive shudder passed through his frame, accompanied by a low rattle in his throat. The girl found herself face to face with death——"*

As for Dormant, he found himself quite suddenly, and without any such preliminary refinements as a spiral of smoke, confronted with a head, a pair of shoulders, seated in the chair—and neither head, nor pair of shoulders were those of the Ghost.

The second Lord Drawbridge had disappeared and in his place, in the same attitude, sat Dormant's father.

"Father, I don't know what to say."

"Then say nothing, my boy."

"I don't know why I asked him to make you come here. It seems so very stupid to me now. I don't know what I want, Father. *I don't know what I want.*"

"My poor boy, that's something you never did know, and I don't suppose that you'll learn now."

"Listen," said Dormant, "I prepared all kinds of questions to ask you, but now I can't ask them. I didn't feel it with the other at all, but with you I do: the whole thing is like some damned spiritualist scance with tables vaulting white tape, and cotton-wool spurting from the tufted lobes of uncleaned ears."

"My dear boy, one can't help one's social condition, you know."

"Father, they published the Free Handicap yesterday. I cut it out and have it in my pocket. Would you like to have a look at it?"

"My dear Adrian, we have chariot races where I come from. I never thought that I could take an interest in that kind of thing, but when one has so little else to do one is, as it were, compelled."

Dormant looked at his father.

"In what state do you appear to me?" he said, in a voice so dry, so cold, that he could not believe that it could be his own.

"As I was in life at the outset of my illness," replied Robert Dormant.

The world . . . the world, the round blob, with the blue infinite above.

"You didn't bring me here, did you, Adrian, to talk about your mother?"

"Yes," said Dormant. "Yes, that is precisely what I wanted." He paused and licked his lips, looked at the whisky bottle. "*I suppose*," he added.

"Nothing doing, Adrian."

"Well, that's quite all right, Father. Sorry to have put you to so much inconvenience."

Almost everything has been said, and much of it has been said ineptly. Everything has been thought, modelled. Everything has been built; and hate alone, disillusion, dust, remain; and this last of their afflictions within men's nostrils causes them to sneeze.

"Father . . . did you suffer very much?"

"My dear boy," said Robert Dormant. "It does seem to me that that small expenditure of household gas should remain my affair."

"As you wish," said Dormant.

He hesitated for a moment. Then he leant forward. He did not quite know how he was going to do what he proposed to do, but in the end the movement was executed naturally.

He laid his head upon his father's miraculously tweed-clad knee.

"That's much better, isn't it?" enquired the dead man.

"Yes," said Dormant, "it's much better like that, Father."

"We don't want to make a big thing of it, do we?"

"Certainly not," said Dormant. "And me, least of all."

"My dear boy," said Robert Dormant. "Far from me to inhibit you, but every second of this interview is costing me a more than agonising pain."

"Go away, Father, then . . . go away at once."

"I don't want to go away, dear boy. I don't want to go away without telling you something."

"Father, I did love you . . . I loved you terribly—in just this damned absurd way, too."

"I told you I would tell you a story," said Robert Dormant. "It is a silly story. That kind of story is always silly, and my name is not . . ."

"Yes, I know what your name is not," said Dormant. "Now please tell me the story." He produced a dirty handkerchief and sniffed in its crinkled folds. This was, for him, indeed the most unkind of many cuts brought on by reason of his own stupidity.

"Envy and sentimentality were neighbours," said Robert Dormant. "They grew up together, looked across the garden fence at each other, and shared the shreds of their sherbert puffs. The names of their parents were, respectively, Doubt and Jealousy. As was only to be expected the parents were most strongly opposed to the marriage of the young couple, but the scruples of both families were eventually overcome. The young creatures were married. In due course they had a son, whose name was——"

"Don't build up the suspense," said Dormant. "His name was Love, wasn't it?"

"Yes, his name was Love," said Robert Dormant, "and that is the end of my story, and now I must leave you."

"Oh, no," said his son, employing a harsh and most peculiar tone of voice. "All Heaven withstanding, you don't leave this room until you've told me what happened to the dog and to Mother."

"They are quite comfortable, I have been given to understand," said Robert Dormant, uncomfortably.

And, despite the accusatory stare of his son, he managed somehow to disappear.

Dormant observed subsequently a most peculiar phenomenon.

The convulatory spiral of smoke was not grey, this time, but quite black.

"But damn it," he thought, "I have seen the grave. I know very well that he was buried in consecrated ground."

## Sixteen

REGLNT SIRLLT was crowded with Christmas shoppers. The hour was the early afternoon.

"Your children are all grown up now, I suppose?" said Glenn to Maurice Welsh as they entered the toy shop. Although it was well-known that Welsh had been separated from his wife for more than a decade, Glenn's tone of voice was offensive, clearly intending to convey that his companion had within recent years become sterile or impotent; or possibly both.

"Yes," said Maurice Welsh.

"What are you giving them for Christmas?"

"Well, I rather thought of coming along to your office and choosing them a few good books."

"I am not reprinting the *Decameron* this year," said Glenn. A salesman approached him. "I want trains," said Glenn. "I want electric trains for a maniac aged seven." He consulted a piece of paper. "There must be a turntable, a marshalling yard, and a break-down crane," he added.

"Come this way, please, sir," said the salesman.

"How in God's name can my engine advance if you keep cutting off the current?" shouted Glenn, a few minutes later.

"You seem to forget that your engine is supposed to be derailed," remonstrated Maurice Welsh. "It is now *my* turn to come along with the break-down crane."

"It doesn't surprise me you play this game well," said

Glenn, viciously. "It goes well with your single-track mind."

Maurice Welsh ignored the insult. He was fiddling with the levers of a miniature signal-box.

"Pack it all up," said Glenn to the salesman. "I'm taking it with me."

"But wouldn't you prefer us to send it to your address, sir? The parcel will be heavy."

"I am a publisher, and therefore possess a tame chauffeur, whose wages are paid by the Chancellor of the Exchequer," said Glenn. "Do you wish to have the child trample a valuable nurse to death in his attempts to get at the parcel? Don't be stupid, man. Put the whole lot in a box."

"Where shall I drop you?" he said pointedly to Maurice Welsh as, ensconced in the car, they proceeded slowly towards Piccadilly.

"I don't want to be dropped anywhere," replied Welsh. "As a matter of fact I want to have a talk with you."

"Oh, God, don't tell me Connolly's liver is better and that you plan to start another literary magazine?"

"No, nothing like that.

"You have been writing your memoirs, then?" said Glenn, suspiciously.

"Well, yes . . . I've certainly been doing something on those lines . . ." began Welsh.

"Drop Mr. Welsh at Obadiah Shape's," said Glenn in a firm voice to the chauffeur. This order represented no isolated gambit upon his part, but was, rather, his constant practice, whenever an author was becoming particularly tiresome.

When that occurred, Glenn would announce to the wretched man that this other House, his excellent and stately rivals, were secretly much interested in the type of book under discussion. As a result he was constantly receiving



angry telephone calls from directors of Shape's. Within measurable time, it seemed, they would be obliged to enlarge their waiting-rooms.

"It is about Dormant," said Maurice Welsh.

"Don't mention that name to me, even in fun," said Glenn.

"I suppose you know that I have taken over his work for Lord Drawbridge?"

"Yes," said Glenn. "I received a letter signed 'Mendoza' on that subject. It is useless for Dormant to imagine that he can avoid his obligations merely by changing his name. He owes me three books, and if I don't get them I shall put Dormant in my medical department and make him work off his advance correcting proofs concerning diabetes. Where is he now, anyway?"

"Nobody seems to know. I rang up Lady Drawbridge this morning and she told me he went away three days ago, together with her secretary. He's supposed to be somewhere in the country, finishing a book."

"Nonsense," said Glenn. "Dormant never even begins his damned books until each of his successive women have grown tired of him. Don't tell me this secretary is another Levantine, or I shall scream."

"She is English," said Welsh.

"One can never tell . . . that may make it worse," said Glenn, gloomily.

Maurice Welsh, however, seemed to have preoccupations of another order. "Tell me," he said. "Do you believe in the after-life?"

"My God," said Glenn. "Are you working for a Sunday newspaper, too, together with all your other activities?"

"I am asking you a question."

"Very difficult to reply," said Glenn. "There is such constant mention of calves, sheep and lambs in the Bible that

one is inclined to assume that their skins must be used to bind books in Heaven. You're not going over to the Catholics, I hope?" he added, with the tinge of desperation in his voice. Then: "Will the time *never* come when a man who can write becomes a practising Primitive Methodist?"

"Something very peculiar occurred in my office yesterday evening," said Maurice Welsh.

"Well, Maurice, I always did say you'd come to it. You have allowed the beast within you to lie quiet too long."

Maurice Welsh ignored this indelicate remark. "Have you ever seen a Ghost?" he said.

Glenn leant forward. He spoke to the chauffeur. "On second thoughts," he said, "I think you had better drop Mr. Welsh at the Reform Club. That is quite clearly the place for him."

This was not destined to be the happiest afternoon of Glenn's life. The disastrous tone of the subsequent proceedings was set when, returning to his office, he discovered a crowd of his minor employees gathered in the hall.

"What's going on here?" he said. Although a kindly employer, he preferred to see a girl seated; experience having taught him that once women were on their feet they invariably made off in search of a cup of tea, or a telephone extension.

The girls, among whom was Glenn's secretary, opened their ranks, disclosing a large florist's basket in which reposed, suitably encased by cellophane, several dozen camellias of very great splendour, the whole fringed by many furry clumps of mimosa.

"Who is this for?" demanded Glenn. Only a month ago, having learnt that a well-known lady novelist had attempted to obtain a refund on a bouquet of roses at the source of its

supply, he had issued instructions that authors, whatever their sales, were on no account to be given flowers or chocolates.

"Who is this for?" repeated Glenn sternly.

Nobody made any comprehensible reply, but Glenn's secretary, more courageous than her colleagues, permitted herself a fluttering movement of her right hand in the direction of a postcard set within the roses.

Glenn picked up the postcard, and read, beneath his name, the words: "*To my darling . . . hoping that we shall meet again soon.*"

"I have placed *The Language of Flowers* on your table, Mr. Glenn," said his secretary, demurely. "If you remember, we published it last year. There's a whole chapter on mimosa."

Glenn who was perfectly cognisant of the particular message implicit in mimosa, threw her a furious glance. "This is some dirty trick by the Conservative Central office," he said. He had indeed published so many books of memoirs by Labour Peers recently that the supposition was a reasonable one, Tories being, as everyone knew, capable of many felonies. But, in his heart, Glenn did not really believe himself to be the victim of the Rimrose League, but considered, rather, the flowers to be the work of another fellow-publisher, Hamish Hamilton, to whom he had recently caused to be sent a skeleton with a request that it should be placed in some suitable cupboard.

This incident at a dead end, Glenn proceeded upstairs. The day was a Tuesday. This implied—for Glenn's routine was as regular and as circumscribed as that of the Royal Family—that he was now destined to spend the afternoon dealing with such arrears of correspondence as should have arisen, and with the reading of such manuscripts as his panel of readers had particularly recommended as worthy of his attention.

"Is anybody downstairs?" enquired Glenn.

"No," replied his secretary.

In this assumption, however, the young lady showed ignorance of the true facts. No less than five people were downstairs in the waiting-room, and four of them were Travellers who, knowing very well that they could not expect to transact any business in that house before tea-time were engaged upon a game of poker, in which, after a certain amount of hesitation and whispering, they had invited a fifth personality present to join them.

This last was a little man with a sharp nose and beady eyes who, after certain initial losses which had seemed to suggest that he was not entirely conversant with the rules of the game, had, for the past half-hour been winning so steadily that two of the Travellers had been obliged to go upstairs and demand an advance upon their monthly salary.

"Not an author, are you, sir?" enquired one of them at last.

"No, sir," replied the little man.

"Well, an agent, perhaps?"

"I am a student of Life, sir," replied Mr. Mendoza as, challenged to do so, he laid down a Royal Flush.

Upstairs, Glenn was dictating the last of his letters. This letter was destined for a young lady in Shropshire, whose second novel would be published during the course of the following week.

"What did I say to her last time?" he enquired.

The secretary consulted the file: "You said that you were proud that her name should first appear before the public under our imprint, Mr. Glenn."

"And how much did she sell?"

"Sixteen hundred, Mr. Glenn."

"Then tell her I hope she'll do better with this one, or she'll have to go somewhere else."

The secretary was perfectly accustomed to interpreting Glenn's instructions. On the following morning, therefore, the young lady in Shropshire received a letter, which concluded with the following phrase: "*. . . and I trust and believe, my dear, that with this second book we shall be able to introduce you to that wider public, to reach which must always be the novelist's aim and aspiration. At least, it will not be for want of ~~us~~ trying if we don't. . . .*"

"Anything else, Mr. Glenn?"

Glenn shifted foot beneath the table. He did not look at his secretary but at a photograph of Ramsay Macdonald on the wall. "No news of that damned fool, Dormant, I suppose?" he said gruffly.

"No, Mr. Glenn, none at all." A little more, one could not help thinking, and the young woman would have crossed herself as a protection against the Evil Eye.

"And you say that he returned his contract, and that it was signed?"

"Yes, Mr. Glenn."

"Something damned queer is going on in that quarter," said Glenn. He felt an urgent need, not unconnected with the imperfection of his digestive processes, to persecute somebody and, as often happened when this occurred in the afternoon, his choice fell upon Ford, the chief of his Publicity Department.

"Ask Mr. Ford to step down here a moment," he said, benignly.

The secretary gave her employer a startled glance, then hurried upstairs to warn Ford that Glenn was setting traps including pressure switches for the unwary.

On entering the room, Ford successfully avoided the various hazards which Glenn had somewhat half-heartedly placed in position.

"You wanted to see me?" he said.

"Yes. What is all this nonsense you've been putting in the catalogue?"

"I am not aware that I have inserted any nonsense," replied Ford stiffly.

"I refer to your description of Dormant's last book." Glenn pulled the proofs of the catalogue towards him. He read from them: *"It isn't often that thousands of ordinary people, like you and I, can say of a book: 'This was written just for me.' Here, at last, is a simple, explosive, contagious idea—here is Life, Goodness, Hope and Faith—and if these things are as important as we have been led to believe, then this book may indeed change the world.* What the devil do you think you're playing at, Ford?"

"I have always felt," replied Ford, "that the only possible way to present Dormant is to exploit a vein of pure fantasy."

The vein of pure rage which Glenn would certainly have exploited upon hearing this remark was left intact; an interruption of a most unexpected order which occurred at that very moment.

The door opened, revealing Mrs. Glenn and the youngest of her several children, a boy aged about six years, owner of his father's mouth and stare.

"Darling," said Mrs. Glenn. "Something terrible has happened."

"Leave us, Ford," said Glenn. At any moment, he knew, his wife might render life impossible by a mention of his dreadful Christian name, Aloysius.

"Now, what is it?" he said, reproachfully, when the man had gone, for it had always been clearly understood in the family that none of his children should become aware of the place, and still less of the nature of his business.

"Darling. Nurse had tummyache at lunch-time. We all thought it was just the collywobbles, but when the doctor

came he said it was her gall-bladder. I had to rush her to the London Clinic for an operation."

"My Gaard!" said Glenn. He stared morosely at his child who was playing with a piece of trip-wire. "Can't you get a Universal Aupt or something?" he said.

It was Mrs. Glenn's turn to look reproachful: "Darling, you know none of the respectable agencies will have anything to do with us since that business of the grass-snake in the bed."

"But surely you don't propose to leave it here, do you?" said Glenn, appalled.

"Darling, I must. I have to meet Cynthia at five. Do be kind and look after it until dinner-time. It's promised to be good."

"I didn't know that Daddy worked," said the child.

"You see," cried Glenn. "You see what you've let me in for now," and, indeed, already the child had removed a box of cigars from the desk and was dissecting the contents with an air of scientific absorption.

"Darling, I must rush. It's awfully sweet of you. Would you like a cheese *soufflé* for dinner?"

When his wife had gone Glenn rang for his secretary. "Have we anything like a fence, or which could serve as a fence, in the building?" he said.

"I don't think so, Mr. Glenn."

"Then we shall have to do the best we can with a wall of typewriters and books." He pointed to his son. "Take this frightful thing downstairs," he said. "Enclose it in a corner of the waiting-room in such a way that it cannot escape except by burrowing. Over there is a large box which contains an electric train. When the child is imprisoned give it the box and tell it, in a taunting manner, that the engine is unbreakable. This means that it will be quiet for at least an hour while it attempts to break the thing. Also purchase

food . . . a great deal of food . . . and lay this food on plates surrounding the child. One of the few rules of polite behaviour which he observes is not to talk when his mouth is full."

"Yes, Mr. Glenn," said the secretary. She paused: "By the way," she said, "Mr. Snipe has just arrived and wants to see you."

"What's that?" said Glenn. Such a visit, on the part of his Chief Accountant, normally domiciled in the firm's printing works in Surrey, was quite unprecedented.

"He says it is rather urgent, and that he wants to ask your advice."

"All right . . . send him up."

Gloomily, Glenn surveyed the Juan Miro which a French editor had given him in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade him to publish a particularly bad *Prix Goncourt* novel.

"Well, Snipe, what is it?"

Mr. Snipe was Yorkshire. He was as Yorkshire as the great Priestley, as the moors upon which his bird namesakes were annually slaughtered. Mr. Snipe was as broad as his accent, and extremely reliable. He had been in the service of the company for twenty-five years.

"Mr. Glenn," he said. "Something most peculiar has occurred, but before I proceed to that matter I would like to call your attention to another." Mr. Snipe coughed. He fingered his brief-case. The demand which he had to make was, he well knew, almost impossible of realisation. "Mr. Glenn," he said, "do you not think it is time that we called a Board Meeting?"

"Good God . . . whatever for?" The Supreme Being to whom Glenn made reference could hardly have been more shocked had Moses, upon Mount Sinai, refused to take orders and proposed instead a sit-down conference, with Aaron participating.



"Well," replied Mr. Snipe diplomatically. "It would enable us to conform with the provisions of the Company Act for one thing."

"But I never know exactly how many companies we have," said Glenn, plaintively. "Besides, you know as well as I do, how difficult it is to get hold of the directors."

This was true enough: of the four other principals of the firm, all hard-working men, each with his allotted task to perform, two at any given time were invariably in strange places—Malaya, Melbourne, Toronto or San Francisco. The migratory habit, the urge to bring British books within the reach of ignorant Chinese, of recalcitrant Americans, of the uncultured French was as strong in these men as it was indeed, in Glenn himself.

Dormant had once asked Glenn if he might not be permitted to lie beneath the table at one of these Board Meetings, and had received a reply in much the same terms, as those with which Mr. Snipe was greeted now:

"My dear boy, we are all far too occupied in getting on with our jobs to indulge in the kind of pompous operations with which popular novelists are apt to invest the activities of so-called business men. If we were to waste our time discussing the vagaries, quirks and perversions of authors our real business which, it may astonish you to know, is one of selling books, would suffer and we should all end up in the nut-house via Carey Street."

It was Glenn's habit, when he wished to speak of the ultimate in terms of human disaster, to refer to that celebrated lieu of bankruptcy, and on one occasion Dormant, having persuaded the man to enter a taxi instead of one of his numerous Daimlers, had given the driver secret instructions in a muffled voice.

"Where are you taking me, damn it?" Glenn had shouted, uneasily. He had always been convinced that the only

public places in which Dormant was ever seen, or indeed allowed, were the town'stews and brothels.

But Dormant had taken him to Carey Street, thus transferring—who knew—symbolically, his own death-wish.

The name of Dormant, which had recurred all too frequently that afternoon, now caused Glenn to examine Mr. Snipe with a fear as sudden and as deep as he had once shown when imprisoned in the taxi.

"Listen," he said urgently. "I will have a Board Meeting. I'll go to China or kiss Charles Morgan if you wish, but don't tell me you've come to talk about that maniac, Dormant."

Mr. Snipe had a great respect for his chief. He did not wish to see him suffer, yet, as he reflected, in that philosophical way which is more common than is generally imagined among accountants, some suffering is salutary, and may even be positively beneficial if it results in the excision of a frightful furuncle.

"I have indeed, I'm afraid," he replied.

"My Gaard . . . this is too much. What's happened now?"

Mr. Snipe spoke in the toneless voice, devoid either of expression or vindictiveness, with which policemen, describing turbulent proceedings in Piccadilly on the previous evening, make their report to the Magistrates of Bow Street:

*"I approached the prisoner, your worship. I informed him that his conduct constituted a breach of the peace. The prisoner was, in my opinion, drunk, your worship. I called upon him to move on, whereupon he replied . . ."*

*"Well yes, Constable, hurry up . . . what did he reply?"*

*"The prisoner replied: 'You ——ing, ——ing bastard,' your worship, whereupon I took him into custody."*

And very similarly, and in a voice quite as empty of resentment, Mr. Snipe upon the present occasion:

"At twelve-twenty-five p.m., Mr. Glenn," he said, "a taxi

drew up outside the works. Looking out of my window—my attention having been drawn to the matter by my secretary, who was somewhat alarmed—I perceived that the vehicle contained Mr. Dormant and a young lady. Mr. Dormant disembarked.”

“Hm ” grunted Glenn. “I suppose he wanted you to pay for the taxi?”

“Far from it, sir. Entering my office, he said, if I remember his exact words: ‘*Ab, Mr. Snipe, this is where the fun begins.*’ Whereupon, opening a brief-case, he laid on my desk the sum of £1097.16.6. in one-pound notes and silver, declaring that he wished to make full if belated repayment of his indebtedness to us.”

“Sixteen and six?” said Glenn.

Mr. Snipe was incapable of blushing, but his face, under the stress of strong emotion, could redden slightly: “He said that he wanted me to buy myself a new pipe with the balance, Mr. Glenn.”

“Well, and what happened then?”

“Nothing,” said Mr. Snipe. “He went away.”

“But in what direction, man?”

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Snipe unhappily.

The situation obtaining between the two men might have remained for many minutes at this point of doubt and indecision had not, at this very moment a piercing cry—a woman’s cry—of agony, disturbed the peace of those vast premises.

“Wait a moment,” said Glenn, rising. Then, after reflecting: “No, no . . . don’t wait. Go back to the works, Mr. Snipe. I’ll ring you if I need you.”

He dashed down the magnificent imitation Jacobean staircase. The basket of flowers still reposed in the hall, but the members of his staff had long since dispersed towards their respective occupations.

In the waiting-room, a small man, whom Glenn did not recollect having seen before, was counting what appeared to be a very considerable sum of money at a table. Toward this part of the general scene Glenn could not, however—and that for the most valid reasons—spare a moment of his time.

In another corner of the room behind a wall of books which he had ordered to be erected, Glenn's secretary was hopping about on one leg, holding the other in her hands, and uttering low cries of pain.

The child, Glenn's son, who should have been, by now, incarcerated was, instead, at liberty, and only too obviously looking about for some new prospect of devilment.

"Now what's happened?" demanded Glenn.

"Oh, Mr. Glenn, I'm so sorry. I did try to put him in here with his trains, but he wouldn't go. Instead, he put me inside himself, and then he came and pricked me with a pin. Oh, look!" The girl's voice rose in fear: "*Oh, look . . . he's got it out again.*"

"Give me that pin," said Glenn to his son.

The child, far from abandoning his weapon, replied with a rude word which, most certainly, he had never learnt upon his nurse's knee, though he may possibly have observed it in certain of the books published by his father.

It was that moment, when deadlock between parent and son seemed inevitable, that the small man seated at the table, and who had previously been too occupied with the counting of his cash, perhaps, to take much interest in the scene, arose, and advancing, stood before the child.

"Sonny, that's no way to talk to your father," he said, severely.

The child gazed at the small man in stupefaction.

"Who the devil are you?" said Glenn. Certain of the authors upon his list were necessarily—and, he had always

considered, providentially—unknown to him personally, but this man seemed to fit into no known category, unless it could be the medical textbook section.

“Yes, who the devil are you?” he repeated.

“Sir, do not trouble yourself with that,” replied Mr. Mendoza, pocketing his poker winnings. “A friend in need is a friend, indeed. Allow me to deal with this situation. I have had considerable experience with children.”

“That doesn’t mean you’ve had any with this one,” said Glenn. He gazed at his son—a child who might one day, a Nero in Bloomsbury, direct the destinies of a hundred scribblers—with intense dislike.

“Sonny,” said Mr. Mendoza gently. “Go back behind those books and play with your train.”

“A short silence ensued, pregnant with the conflict of two powerful wills. then, to Glenn’s amazement, his son obeyed.

With a delicate courtesy, Mr. Mendoza offered the wounded secretary the aid of his hand, thus enabling her to escape from her imprisonment.

“Go back upstairs, sir,” he said to Glenn. “Go back upstairs and proceed with your important work. Have every confidence. The young lady, too, has no doubt other duties to perform?”

“Do you really think you can manage him?” said Glenn, gratitude struggling with scepticism in his heart.

“Certainly,” said Mr. Mendoza. “I managed Sam Goldwyn, sir. You are also talking to the man who managed the crowd scenes when they were shooting ‘*Genghis Khan*’.”

“All right,” said Glenn. “And if there is anything I can ever do for you, just ask me.” He paused. There was a constriction in his throat, but he was a generous man, and there could be no doubt that the present situation was

deserving of the supreme, the ultimate concession. "All right," he repeated resignedly. "I suppose you've written a novel. Well—God damn it," he swallowed heavily but at last the words came out: "All right, I'll publish it."

"Sir," said Mr. Mendoza reproachfully. "Sir, you are making a mistake. I *live* my life. What would I want with a pen in my hands?"

"A remarkable person, that," said Glenn amiably to his secretary, as they mounted the stairs. "Who can he be, I wonder?"

"Do you know, Mr. Glenn," replied the girl. "I've a funny feeling that I've seen him before, and that he is a friend of Mr. Dormant's."

"*Eh?*" said Glenn, startled out of his euphoria by the renewed mention of that fatal word.

It was perhaps just as well that Glenn was thus shaken as it also is beneficial that the first premonitory tremors of the earth should warn threatened populations of impending disasters.

Because, on re-entering his office, the first sight which met Glenn's eyes was that of Dormant, himself, ensconced at ease, and with legs crossed, in the arm-chair.

The angry exclamation which arose in Glenn's throat would undoubtedly have been uttered had he not, almost simultaneously, perceived that Dormant was not alone.

In another chair a rather good-looking young woman—who, although this fact seemed entirely incredible when taken in relation to her present company—who . . . yes . . . had all the appearance of being a lady . . . was sitting.

"Dormant . . ." said Glenn heavily. In the circumstances this word was both as strong as any he could bring himself to utter, and entirely expressive of his feelings.

"Did you get the flowers all right?" said Dormant.

"Oh, it was you, was it?" said Glenn, thickly.

"Naturally. You'll find something else for you sitting on your desk, but before you take a look at it, will you allow me to introduce to you my future wife?"

"I can't talk Greek," said Glenn, unhappily. He did not wish to hurt the girl's feeling. What a terrible fate, he thought . . . such a pleasant-looking woman, too, which made it all so much more tragic. Was there no way in which he could intervene . . . maybe Ford spoke a little Greek and could warn her?

"She's quite as English as you are, and much more pretty," said Dormant. "She has been chasing cows and working rather hard in other ways for the past few days, so that perhaps you don't see her now at her most resplendent, but I assure you that when I have had time to occupy myself with her for an extensive period she will flower as few flowers have ever flowered, and for a longer period. Isn't that so, darling?"

"Yes, darling," said Caroline. "Anything you say."

Glenn gazed at the couple in astonishment, but more particularly did he stare at Caroline. "Just a moment, Adrian," he said, and his manner was now considerably more amiable. "Is it like this with all . . ." he had been about to add, "with all your women," but succeeded in checking himself in time, "with you all the time?"

"Oh, yes," replied Dormant heartily. "All day, and night, too: isn't it, darling?"

"That's right, darling," said Caroline. "Anything you say."

(They had rehearsed the whole act several times: "*Listen*," Dormant had told. "*I'll be shaken quite badly enough when he receives the three manuscripts. I just need one more thing to be made for life, and that's for you to play the meek and submissive little woman.*")

Glenn continued to stare at Caroline open-mouthed. This is no figure of speech. Glenn's jaw had in point of fact fallen: his mouth was open at least two inches.

The woman doesn't *look* like an imbecile, he was thinking: can it be that she is in her right mind, and is dimly—although obviously she cannot be *entirely* aware—of what she has undertaken? At this stage, a new thought occurred to him: perhaps, he thought . . . perhaps all these drabs that the man writes about are, in reality, quite acceptable members of society? Perhaps the explanation is that Dormant is unable to describe them except in a distorted manner?

"I've been looking forward to meeting you, Mr. Glenn," said Caroline. "I shall be becoming Adrian's secretary, too, as well as his wife, you know."

"After my divorce, of course," put in Dormant, loftily.

"Ah, yes?" said Glenn vaguely. Good God, he thought, perhaps the girl is also efficient, besides being beautiful? Does this mean no more of those terrible manuscripts typed on what appear to have been Boer War machines, covered with wine-stains, and private remarks addressed to myself?

"Ah, yes?" he said again, and then, since, as has already been stated, he was a generous man, the qualms of compassion began to assail him. After all, he reflected, Dormant had paid the money owed, although he had not been requested to do so. Of course, he had undoubtedly done this merely to impress the girl, but, nevertheless . . . well, it must be admitted that the fact of the gesture remained. Only too obviously the couple would not have a great deal of money. . . .

"I've been thinking," he said. (Not a single cry had been heard from downstairs since the beginning of this interview. Glenn's mind was now, therefore, clear. He felt capable of conducting business.) "Yes, I've been thinking," he continued, "that contract I sent you . . . on second



thoughts, I believe that we ought to reconsider the terms. Upon reflection, I feel that . . . how can I put it? . . . that the terms might, in some quarters be considered a trifle," he coughed, "harsh."

"What contract?" said Dormant. "But I have fulfilled that contract. What do you think I placed on your desk. Open the package, my dear sir . . . look at them, look . . ."

Glenn untied the string.

"You're not trying to palm off on me any of your juvenilia are you, Adrian?" he said suspiciously.

"I don't know that I care for that offensive remark," said Dormant. "If you will be so good as to inspect them you will find that one of my books is a historical novel set in France, the second the fictitious autobiography of an American stranded in Bulgaria, for which I have been collecting documentary evidence for a considerable time, and the third the account of a good man's tragic destiny in Victorian times."

"But when did you write these books, man?"

"Recently . . . recently," replied Dormant. "I have powers of concentration to which you have never done full justice, as I think you will now agree. Isn't that so, Caroline?" he concluded, imperiously raising his voice.

"Yes, darling. Very remarkable powers."

"You had both better come and have lunch with me," said Glenn: it was the last shot in his locker. He made many offers of luncheon but, in these or similar circumstances, only on the rare occasions when Life had defeated him.

"Three books," he muttered several times, "three books. . . . My *Gaard*," and then with the reaction of every oppressed publisher, his trembling finger went forward to the switch of the house telephone, "Ford," he cried, "Ford . . . come quickly . . . something awful has happened . . . I've been *flooded*."

"I hope you will make that luncheon date *soon?*" said Dormant.

"Who?"

"Well, we're off to Peru, you know as soon as Christmas is over."

Oh, no, thought Glenn . . . no . . . *no* . . . another damned travel book now about South America. Oh, *no*, no. . . .

"Ford."

"Just coming, Mr. Glenn."

"Ford . . . it's Dormant."

"I'm coming very rapidly in that case, Mr. Glenn."

"Good-bye," said Glenn weakly. He held out his hand to Caroline. "These tears in my eyes are not merely fatigue, you know," he said. "I'm so glad to have met you. I'm really very moved . . . very moved, indeed."

"You ought to take a rest, you should," said Dormant, sympathetically. "When you've read my books, of course, he added,

"Come to lunch tomorrow," said Glenn.

"That's right. Well, good-bye now. We'll just look in on a friend of ours downstairs, won't we, darling?"

"Anything you want, darling . . . anything . . . always."

In the passage outside, Dormant put his hand on Caroline's hip. He swung her round towards him.

"You're the star in the sky," he said. "You're the love of my life. You're the blazing meteor: I'm your trail."

She kissed him:

"Right," she said, "and now wipe that silly grin off your face, because from now on you're going to do some real work."

"Give me another kiss, then."

"No . . . no more kisses."

“Darling,” he said. “You wouldn’t inflict that old one on me, would you?”

“No more kisses,” said Caroline, “until you’ve written at least five chapters.”

When Glenn, with a certain lack of verbal coherence, had informed Ford of the events described above, he sat down in the arm-chair. He examined Dormant’s manuscripts:

“But, my God, the man has acquired three completely different new styles,” he said, about twenty minutes later.

A doubt, like a crack across a keystone, had appeared, in another keystone; that of Glenn’s life . . . his belief in his own sure judgment.

One element alone seemed certain.

Slowly, Glenn walked down the stairs. He entered the waiting-room. Mr. Mendoza and his son were quietly playing trains.

Glenn watched them for a while. Then:

“You like children, I see,” he said.

“I’ll say I do,” said Mr. Mendoza.

“You seem, if I may say so, to have unusual powers over the infant mind.”

“Maybe I have, sir,” said Mr. Mendoza. / “There’s no knowing with these matters.”

“I have a proposition to make to you . . . of a rather unusual nature, but then you appear to be an unusual man. That child’s nurse is ill. Female nurses are almost unobtainable at present. I suppose you wouldn’t care to keep an eye on him, temporarily for myself and my wife?”

“I should be very glad to do that, sir, if you feel that I might be of any help to you,” said Mr. Mendoza politely.

He replaced the locomotive, which had fallen off the rails . . . upon the rails.

“But my real ambition,” he said, “is to enter publishing.”

"If you keep that child quiet you can become a director of this firm for all that I care," said Glenn.

"I should have to ask my friend, Mr. Dormant, about that," said Mr. Mendoza.

He did, received his friend's hearty approval, and is now one of the most successful of Glenn's talent scouts. Only the other day, for example, Mr. Mendoza secured the exclusive rights to a book by a man who, having first climbed Mount Kenya, then slid down it slowly while sitting on a plank; nourishing himself exclusively, meanwhile, upon such moss and lichens as the eternal snows provided.

"A story of great human endeavour to warm the cockles of your heart," as Ford said, while sharpening his pencil, to Mr. Snipe.

Glenn, however, was overheard to remark in the Traveller's Club, that if any heat were engendered by spontaneous sympathy it would surely prove to be in another part of the reader's anatomy?

THE END